NEW

ALL ABOUT HISTORY

GREATEST EMPIRES

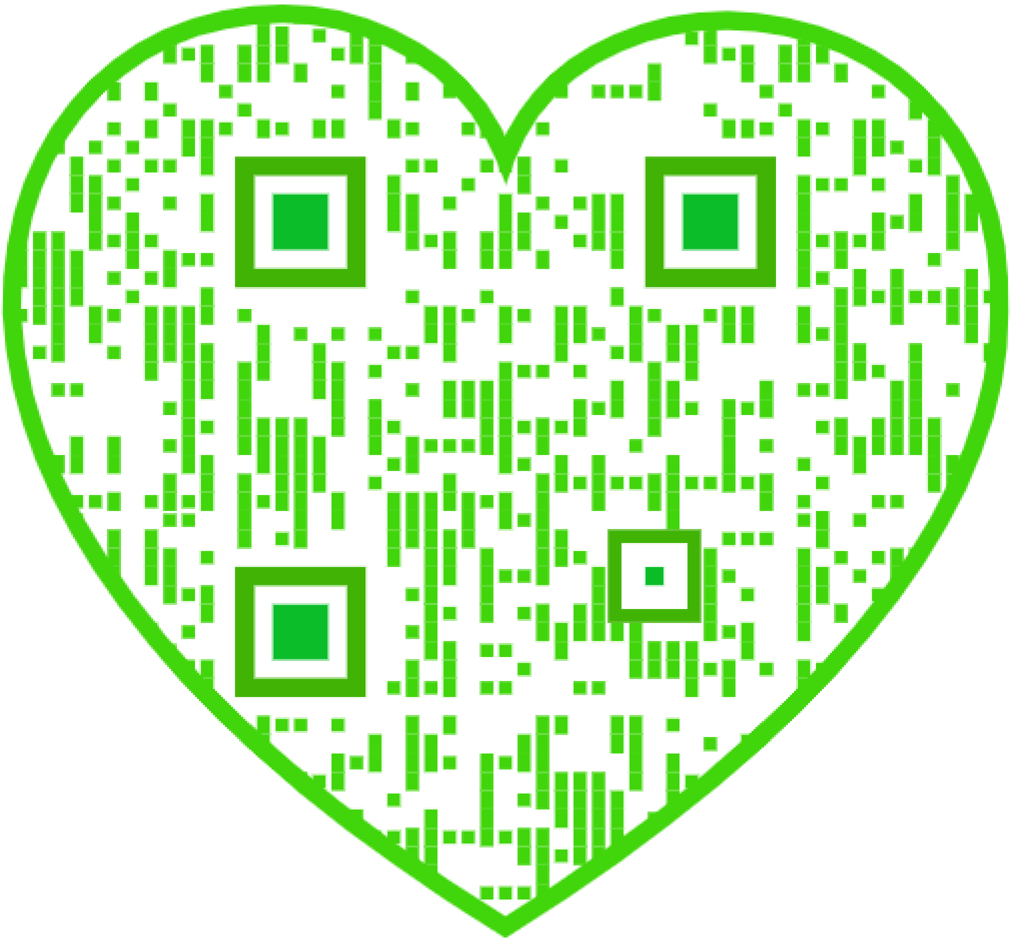
Chart the rise and fall of history's most powerful states

DISCOVER THE EMPIRE ON WHICH THE SUN NEVER SET

ROME ◆ PERSIA ◆ AZTECS ◆ OTTOMAN ◆ ABBASID

Digital Edition

FUTURE
SEVENTH EDITION



Welcome to GREATEST EMPIRES

When people think of empires, they often cast their minds back to the Romans – the military state that spread its influence throughout Europe, North Africa and the Middle East is perhaps the most famous example of imperialism that we have. But does that make it the greatest?

All About History Greatest Empires takes a look at the others that have risen and fallen, from the very first – the Akkadian Empire, founded in 2334 BCE – to the setting of the Sun on the British Empire in 1997 and everything in between. Meet the Spanish and Portuguese, who battled to conquer the New World first, and explore Imperial China and its famous Forbidden City. Discover which empire was behind Islam's Golden Age before heading to Central America to find out about the Aztecs and the Incas. These are history's greatest empires, and they're waiting for you to uncover how their legacies have endured to shape the world we know today.

FUTURE

GREATEST EMPIRES

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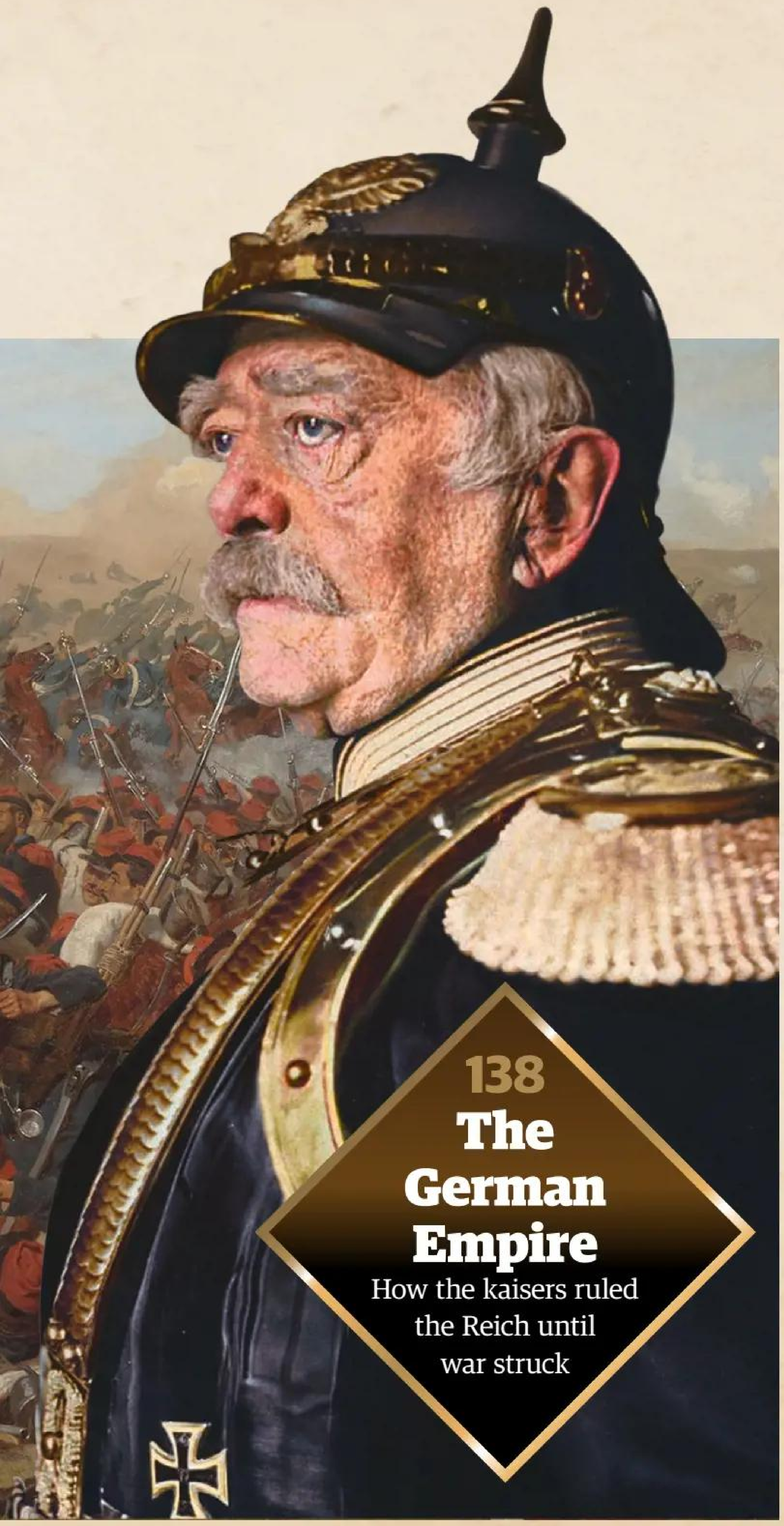

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EMPIRE VS EMPIRE

The most powerful civilisations the world has ever seen face off for the title of greatest empire of all time

Written by April Madden

The word 'empire' can sometimes have negative connotations, conjuring up ideas of conquest, colonialism and oppression. But from another perspective, empires can be seen as the engines that brought about modern civilisation. Since the dawn of the human race, people were looking beyond their own territory and conquering their neighbours. As military technology and logistics progressed, empires emerged. No longer just a collection of local villages and fields, by the 6th century BCE they could encompass vast areas of land.

Their increasing populations meant that standing armies could be bigger (making their next conquest easier to win), while increased revenues from farming and taxes funded the maintenance of those fprces. Despite their faults – and all the empires here are guilty of some major atrocities along with their achievements – at their best, rich, well-fed and well-defended empires provided both the financial and physical security that allowed their citizens to enjoy more wealth, and for the fields of art and science to flourish. In this feature, we take a closer look at ten world-changing empires – the superpowers of their day – but which one comes out on top? ◆

10 GREAT QING EMPIRE

1644-1912

With nearly 300 years of unbroken supremacy to its name, the Qing dynasty was the last of China's imperial families, with its rule replaced by the Republic of China in the early 20th century. Originally made up of a social group of poor rebels called the Jurchen rather than the Han Chinese aristocracy and demographic majority, on seizing power the Qing dynasty maintained many of the same political and civil structures put in place by their predecessors, while asserting the supremacy of their own social identity, which evolved under tribal leader Nurhaci and became known as Manchu.

Later, one of his successors – the regent Dorgon – introduced clothing and haircutting laws designed to oppress his Han subjects that have influenced the stereotypical view of Chinese costume and culture ever since. The long-held tension between the Han and the Manchu was key to the Asian conflicts of World War II, and saw both factions playing out battles whose lines had been drawn centuries before.

KEY LEADERS
Nurhaci, Dorgon, Puyi
WEALTH ★★★☆☆
TERRITORY ★★★★☆
LEGACY ★★☆☆☆
MILITARY MIGHT ★★★☆☆

OVERALL ★★☆☆☆

09

ACHAEMENID EMPIRE

550-330 BCE

At its height, the Achaemenid Empire (or the First Persian Empire) was the largest the world had seen at the time. Founded by Cyrus the Great, it began in the Persian Gulf in the rich lands between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers (now Iraq), encompassed most of the Middle East and stretched from Thrace (Bulgaria) to Afghanistan, Pakistan and northwest India. Its second ruler, Cambyses II, took Egypt, which was the jewel in the crown of the empire, although his own courtiers spectacularly betrayed its last ruler, Darius III, and he eventually lost the empire to Alexander the Great. Herodotus (an Ancient Greek often considered to be the first historian) recorded its rise and fall as a key part of his *Histories*.

While its territory and military might is smaller than some other empires here, the Achaemenid Empire gave civilisation a legacy of practical and life-changing technical and logistic innovations: it had a postal system, a road network that was maintained by the state and an official language to help its citizens communicate. The Persians also invented a garment that is worn by millions of people around the world every day: trousers.

KEY LEADERS
Cyrus the Great, Cambyses II, Darius III
WEALTH ★★★☆☆
TERRITORY ★★★☆☆
LEGACY ★★★★☆
MILITARY MIGHT ★★★☆☆

OVERALL ★★★☆☆

08

BYZANTINE EMPIRE

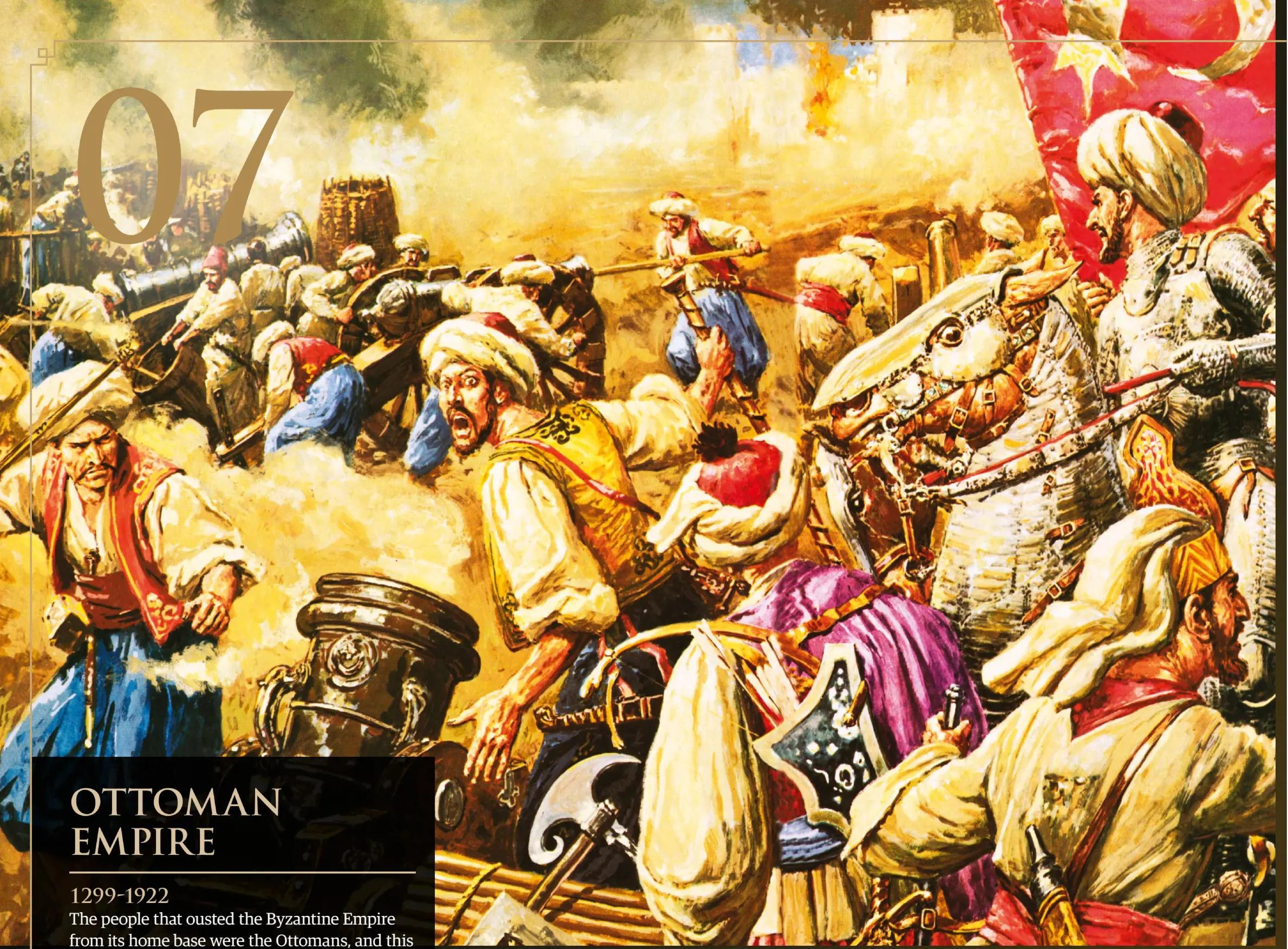
330-1453

It seems from the dates that the Byzantine Empire lasted over 1,000 years, but in fact political manoeuvring, changes in leadership and outright war mean that it skips a few centuries here and there. Its capital city, Byzantium (now Istanbul in present-day Turkey) was originally a Roman outpost, before briefly becoming the capital of the Roman Empire itself and changing its name to Constantinople after Emperor Constantine.

With the fracture of the Roman Empire in 285 CE, the Byzantine Empire set out on its own. Emperor Justinian I reclaimed many of the lands Byzantium had lost in the breakdown of Rome, before taking on Persia, areas of northern Africa and even Italy itself. His aim was to restore the lost glory of Rome, but Byzantium was emerging as a distinct culture in its own right, and Justinian was actually the last emperor who spoke Latin as a first language; subsequent rulers would speak Greek. Under new Macedonian rulers in the 10th century, Emperor Basil II expanded the Byzantine Empire's reach from Russia in the north to southern Italy and from present-day Israel to Germany to the east and west - however, his golden age was the last before the empire collapsed and finally fell in 1453.

KEY LEADERS
Constantine the Great, Justinian I, Basil II
WEALTH ★★★★☆
TERRITORY ★★★★☆
LEGACY ★★★☆☆
MILITARY MIGHT ★★★☆☆

OVERALL ★★★☆☆



07

OTTOMAN EMPIRE

1299-1922

The people that ousted the Byzantine Empire from its home base were the Ottomans, and this empire outdid its predecessor in both territory and staying power. Founded by Osman I in Anatolia (modern-day Turkey), Mehmed II's conquest of Constantinople transformed the Ottoman from upstart to empire. Stretching across the width of the Mediterranean basin from Algiers to Baghdad and north to south from Budapest to the Arabian Gulf at its height, the Ottoman Empire lasted from the Middle Ages until well into the 20th century – and it was all thanks to the strategic location of its capital. This placed it in a crucial nexus between Europe and the East, allowing the empire to feed on territory and trade from both sides. Its longest-reigning and arguably most powerful ruler is remembered with the ostentatious title Suleiman the Magnificent, thanks to the wealth, culture, political traditions and peace his reign brought to the empire.

KEY LEADERS

Osman I, Mehmed II, Suleiman the Magnificent

WEALTH ★★★★★
TERRITORY ★★★☆☆
LEGACY ★★★☆☆
MILITARY MIGHT ★★★★☆

OVERALL ★★★☆☆

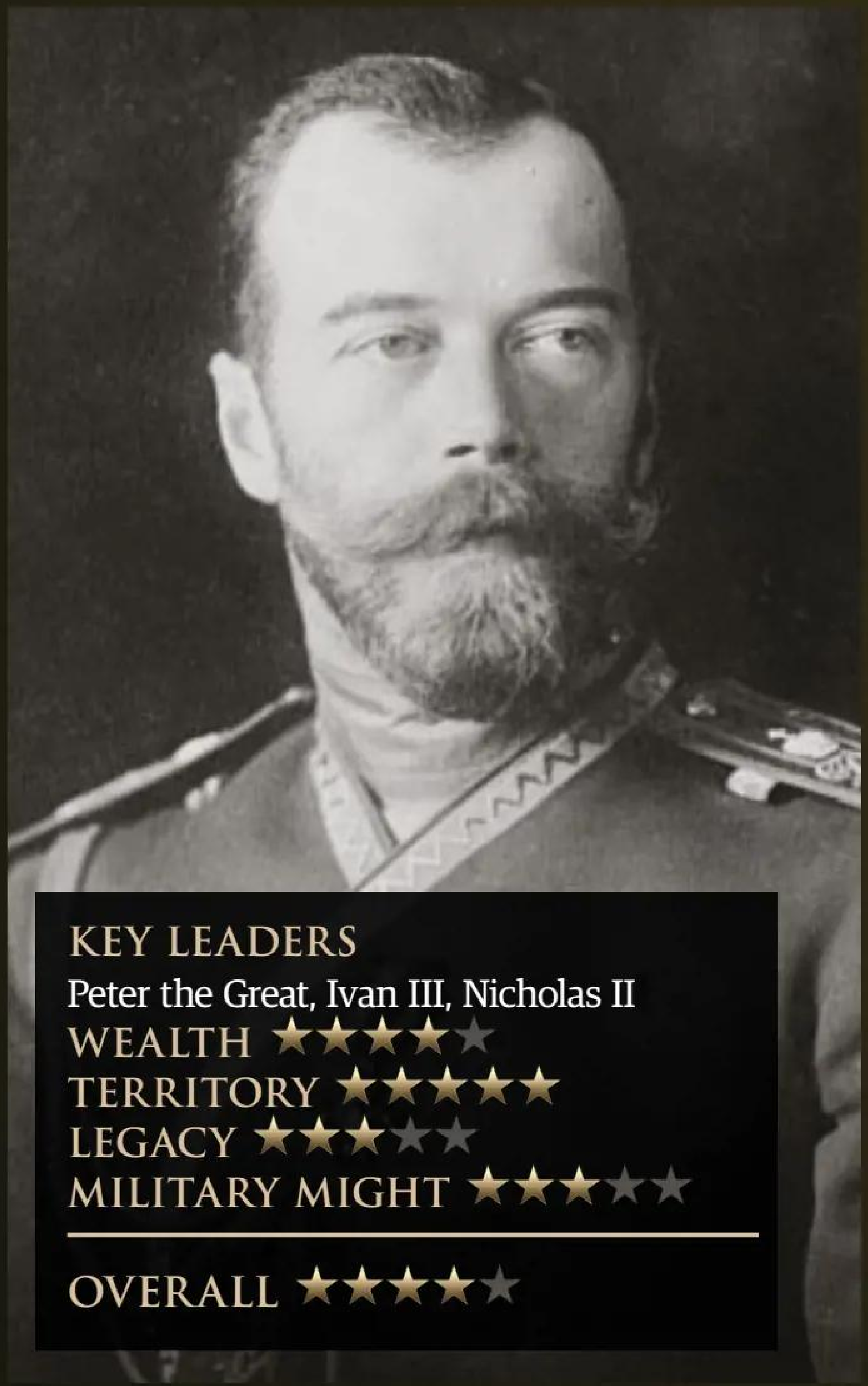
06 RUSSIAN EMPIRE

1721-1917

Although the Ottomans broke the Byzantine Empire, they didn't break its spirit – some of its culture and traditions lived on in Russia. Exported to the Kievan Rus around the 10th century, Byzantine art and its Orthodox Christianity took root and grew into new forms, eventually culminating in the riches of the Russian Empire.

An absolute monarchy – meaning that the emperor wielded total political power – it was founded by Peter the Great (in reaction to the territory grabbing of the Ottomans) and consolidated by Ivan III. Its land encompassed huge tracts of Europe, Asia and even parts of North America from the Arctic to the Pacific.

Fuelled by the fruits of one of the largest imperial territories the world has ever seen, the imperial court's culture of conspicuous consumption was its eventual downfall. Forced to become a less powerful constitutional monarchy in 1905, the last tsar, Nicholas II, had to abdicate in 1917 before being executed along with his family in the revolution.



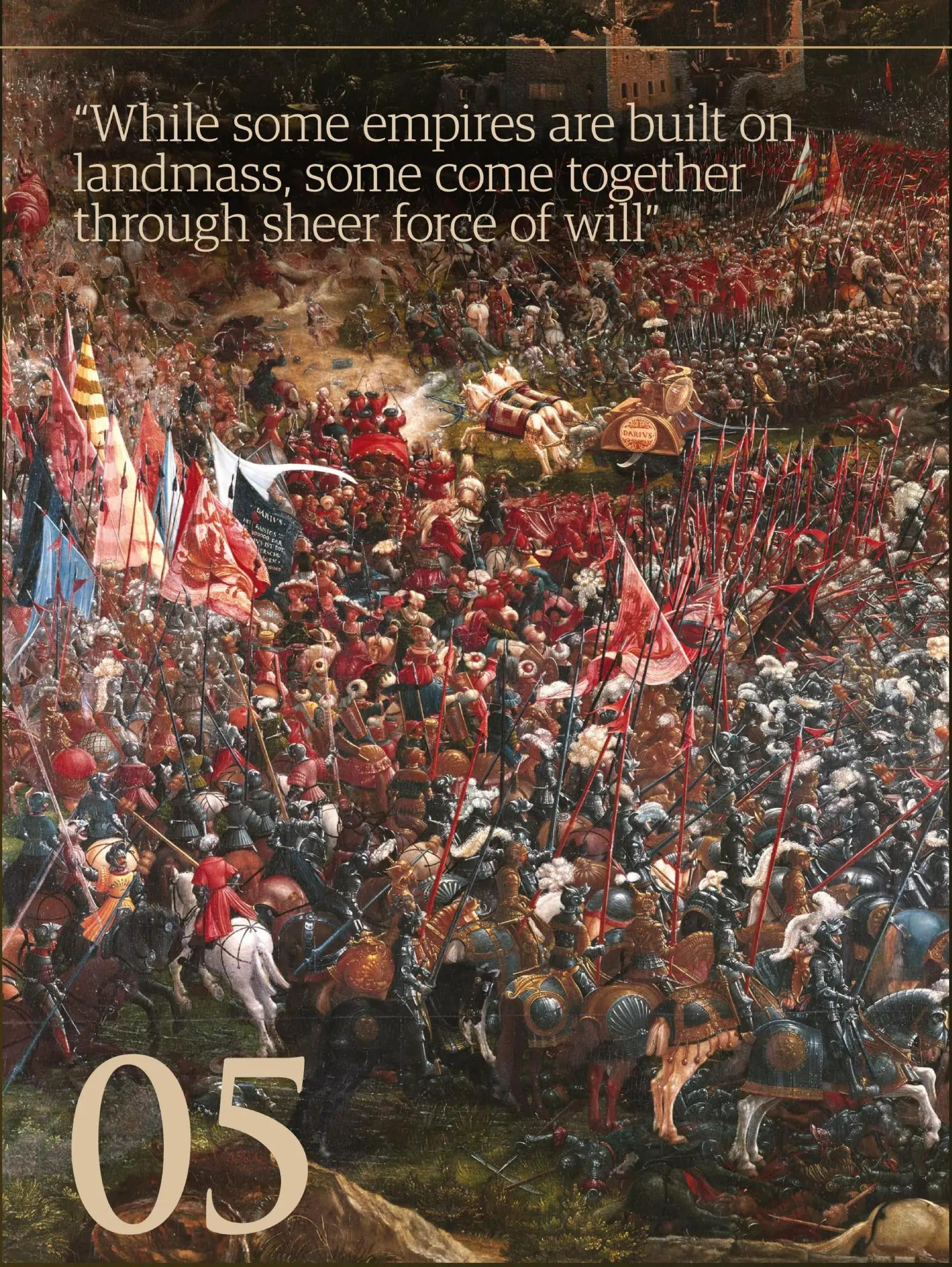
KEY LEADERS

Peter the Great, Ivan III, Nicholas II

WEALTH ★★★★☆
TERRITORY ★★★★★
LEGACY ★★★☆☆
MILITARY MIGHT ★★★☆☆

OVERALL ★★★★☆

> "While some empires are built on landmass, some come together through sheer force of will"



05

MACEDONIAN EMPIRE

9TH CENTURY – 146 BCE

While some empires are built on landmass alone, some come together through sheer force of will. Macedonia was a small kingdom on the outskirts of the Greek heartlands and was considered somewhat backward and rural. But under a father-and-son team of rulers, it would rise to become the most powerful state of its time, dominating the ancient world with a reach from Egypt to India.

Philip II took the throne of Macedon in 359 BCE. He was originally intended to serve as regent for his nephew, but took the throne for himself and began expanding Macedonia's territory outwards. After Philip's assassination in 336 BCE, his son Alexander became king, and with his reign came the military unification of the Greek states, a ten-year campaign that broke the Persian Empire and expanded across the Mediterranean and beyond to India, as well as the conquest of Egypt. Alexander the Great was one of the most brilliant military commanders in history and he was the powerhouse that drove the Macedonian Empire. After his death in 323 BCE at the age of just 33, Alexander's charisma-driven military machine largely fell apart. Without an heir, the empire soon followed it, although Antigonus III eventually re-established some of its local territory.

KEY LEADERS
Philip II, Alexander the Great, Antigonus III Doson
WEALTH ★★★★☆
TERRITORY ★★★★★
LEGACY ★★★☆☆
MILITARY MIGHT ★★★★★

OVERALL ★★★★☆

04 MONGOL EMPIRE

1721-1917

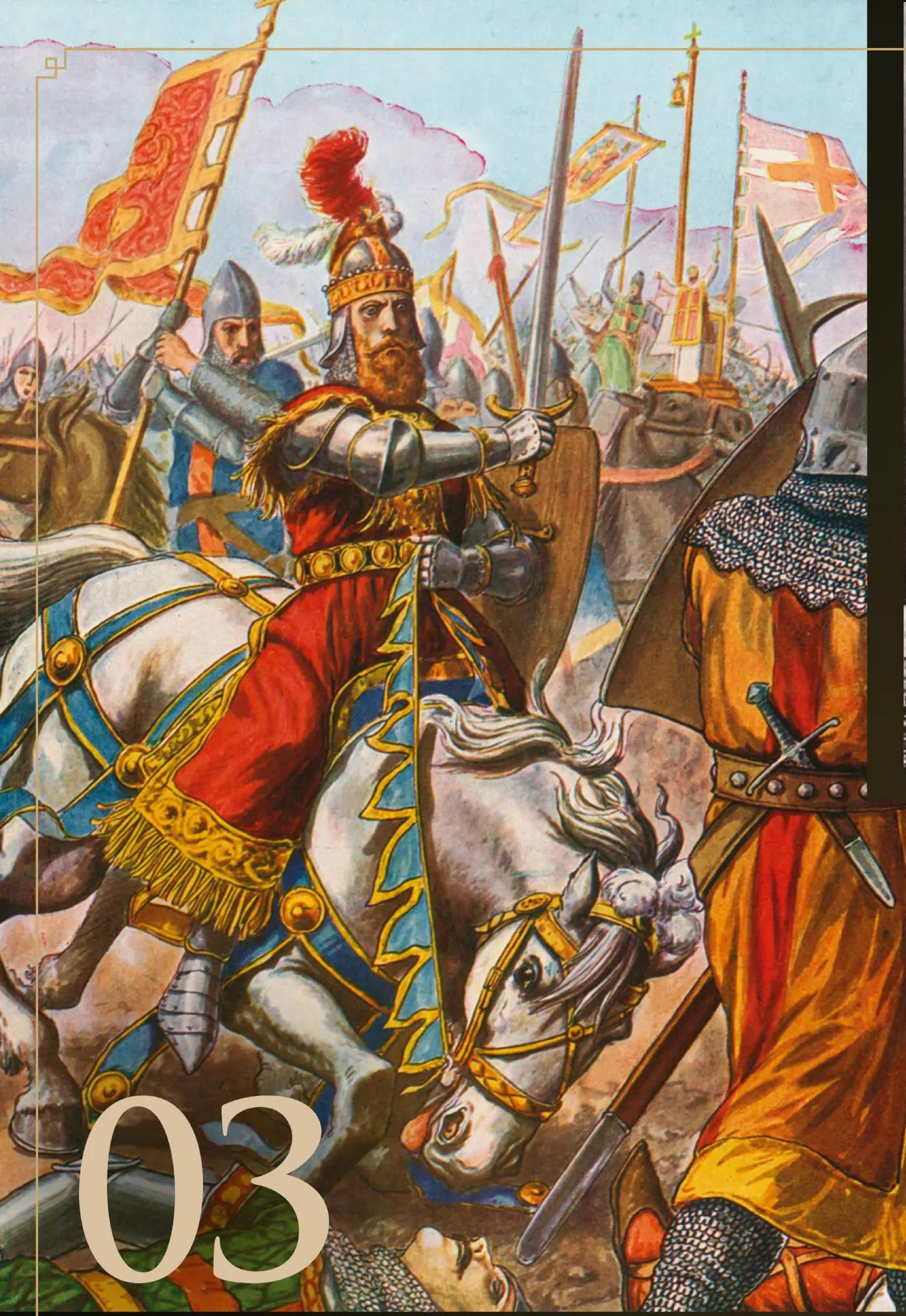
It might have been relatively short-lived, but the Mongol Empire managed to get an awful lot done. Unusually for an empire, it was founded not in a land-grab for living space, but by a nomadic people. Despite this, it ended up as the largest contiguous empire (that is, made up of lands that border each other in an unbroken line) that the world has ever seen. It comprised all of present-day Mongolia and China, stretching from the Sea of Japan all the way to areas of Russia and eastern Europe. An enforced peace among the nations in between increased trade and, for the first time, made Asian goods readily available in Western markets and vice versa, making the Mongol Empire an example of globalisation on a truly massive scale.

On conquering China, the nomadic Mongols retained many of the traditions of the Chinese court. Genghis Khan's grandson, Kublai, in particular was deeply enamoured with all things Chinese and took on the title of emperor of China, founding the Yuan dynasty. He was also instrumental in the European discovery of China; Marco Polo is alleged to have met him and even served as a diplomat on his travels to the East.

After the death of Kublai Khan, the Mongol Empire fractured into several smaller groups, bringing its brief but glorious rule to an end.

KEY LEADERS
Genghis Khan, Möngke Khan, Kublai Khan
WEALTH ★★★★☆
TERRITORY ★★★★★
LEGACY ★★★★☆
MILITARY MIGHT ★★★★★

OVERALL ★★★★☆



03

THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

800-1806

With over 1,000 years to its name, the Holy Roman Empire differs from some of its peers due to its structure. Unlike other empires that imposed common languages and a totalitarian government, the Holy Roman Empire spent much of its time as a confederation of European states, united by the royal dynasty that were otherwise free to speak their own tongue and follow their own customs. It was founded in the early Middle Ages by Charlemagne, who wanted to re-create the power of the Byzantine Empire in central Europe.

At its height under Emperor Henry III, the Holy Roman Empire encompassed much of France, Germany, Bohemia (the Czech Republic and Slovakia) and Italy. Between 1438 and 1740 it was ruled by the Habsburg dynasty, the monarchs of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The first Habsburg ruler of the Holy Roman Empire was Frederick III and the Habsburgs kept familial control of the vast lands until the 18th century, when the genetic consequences of the frequent inter-marrying between cousins in the family led to their eventual demise. The Holy Roman Empire fell to Napoleon less than 100 years later.

KEY LEADERS
Charlemagne, Henry III, Frederick III
WEALTH ★★★★☆
TERRITORY ★★★★★
LEGACY ★★★☆☆
MILITARY MIGHT ★★★★☆

OVERALL ★★★★☆

02

BRITISH EMPIRE

1497-1997

Famously, the Sun never set on the British Empire, thanks to the sheer amount of territory it possessed at its pinnacle. From humble beginnings on one of the world's smallest island nations, the British Empire eventually comprised parts of America, Africa, India, Australia, New Zealand, Asia and the Middle East. It was established, arguably, by Elizabeth I, who sent out explorers such as Francis Drake - ostensibly to find new lands but also to harry Britain's enemies at sea.

With the Industrial Revolution beginning in Britain, it was perfectly poised to use its new technologies to extend its sphere of influence. Steam-powered ships made crossing oceans easier, while trains made transcontinental journeys possible. Communications innovations such as Morse code and later radio and telephone connected the great cities, while distinctly British foods and sports made their way around the world. English is still one of the planet's most widely spoken languages to this day. The British Empire gradually gave up many of its territories or amalgamated them into the current Commonwealth. It is considered to end in 1997 with the return of Hong Kong to Chinese rule.

KEY LEADERS
Elizabeth I, Victoria,
Winston Churchill
WEALTH ★★★★★
TERRITORY ★★★★★
LEGACY ★★★★☆
MILITARY MIGHT ★★★★☆

OVERALL ★★★★★

01

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

27 BCE – 476 CE

It might be smaller than some of the others included here, but the Roman Empire casts a long shadow over history, one that persists to this day. In its time it was the world's largest empire - in fact, it was pretty much Europe's only empire, and it encompassed almost every area of the European continent together with Britain and parts of Africa, modern-day Turkey and the Middle East.

Rome's influence on the world simply can't be overstated. Its crack troops - the legions - were a fighting force to be reckoned with, and successive Roman emperors deployed them in search of more and more conquests, expanding the empire outwards. But Rome wasn't just interested in seizing territory for goods and profit. The Romans genuinely believed that their society and technology represented the high point of civilisation, and they exported many of their technical innovations and traditions to the nations that they conquered. Straight, flat roads made travel and trade easier. Viaducts sprang over valleys and between hills to facilitate travel, while aqueducts channelled water to inland areas without wells and springs. Central heating systems brought warmth to homes - this was especially important as the Romans moved northwards into France and Britain. A common language - Latin - made communication easier.

Rome's technical innovations made many aspects of life better for its populace both inside the city and in the wider empire, but it's Rome's legacy that really makes it the most important empire in history. Byzantium was its home-from-home, and the Roman ideology that flourished there inspired the Byzantines to build their own empire. The Holy Roman Empire saw itself as the last bastion of the Roman civilisation right up until the 19th century. Rome's imperial line - the caesars - gave their name to both the Russian ruler's title - tsar - and to the monarchs of the German Empire, kaiser.

From the territories it unified to the languages and political systems it influenced to its array of technical innovations that have stood the test of time, Rome was truly the empire that most changed the world and left a lasting impact.

KEY LEADERS
Augustus, Hadrian,
Constantine the Great
WEALTH ★★★★☆
TERRITORY ★★★★☆
LEGACY ★★★★★
MILITARY MIGHT ★★★★★

OVERALL ★★★★★

> "Rome's technical innovations made life better for its populace both inside the city and in the wider empire"

© Alamy; Look and Learn

THE AKKADIAN EMPIRE

Discover the spectacular rise and rapid fall of the world's first empire

Written by Scott Reeves

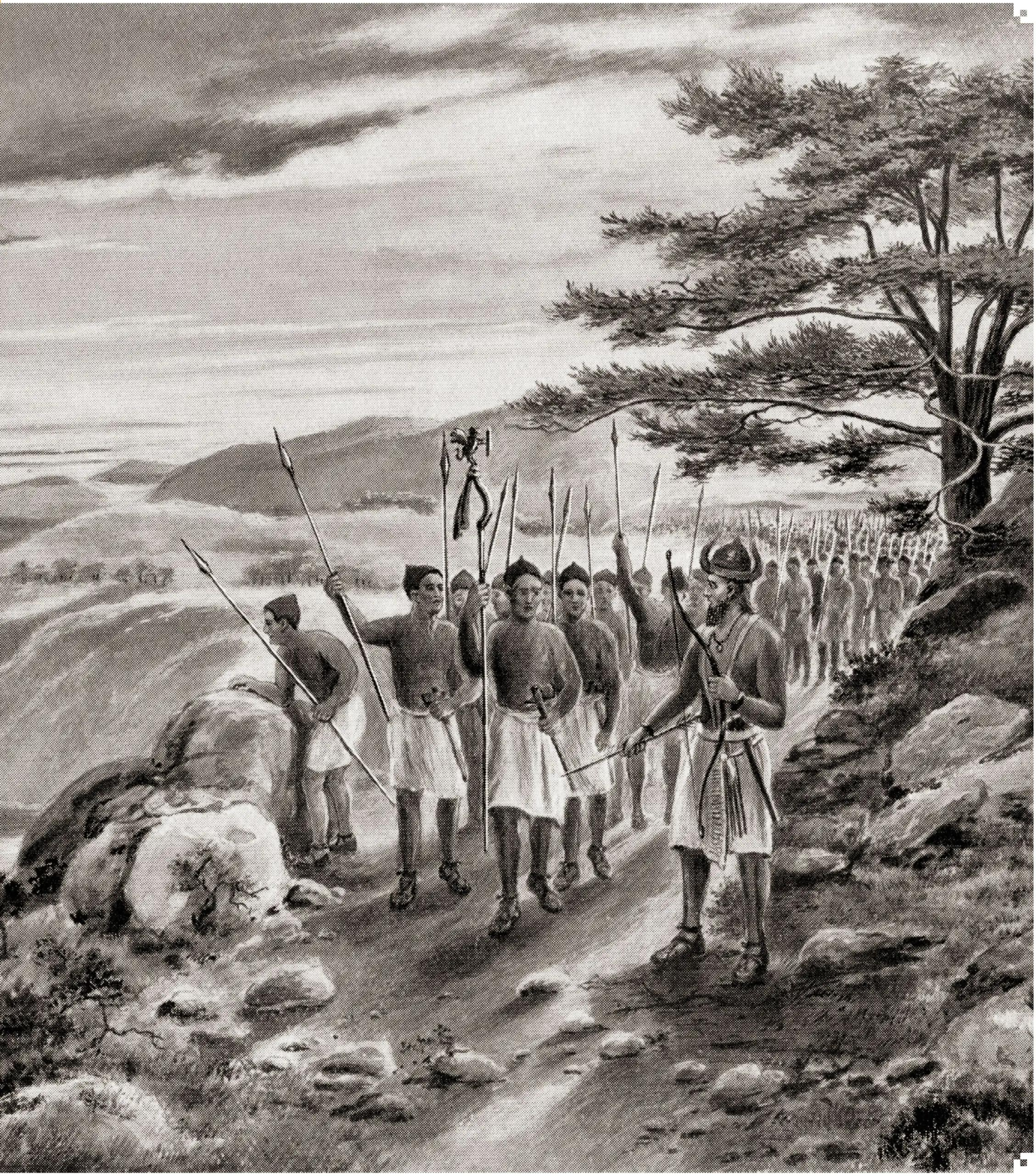
When the 5,000-strong army of Sargon of Akkad managed to conquer the Sumerian city of Uruk – once the biggest in the world, with a population ten times larger than the army that faced it – it was a milestone moment in world history. The balance of power between the kingdoms of Akkad and Sumer had shifted, allowing Sargon to capture 34 more Sumerian cities and his Sumerian fellow monarch, Lugal-Zage-Si. In conquering his neighbour to create a multi-ethnic territory ruled by a central government, Sargon had created the world's first empire in what is mostly modern-day Iraq.

Sargon the Great's rise to power was spectacular. Originally a cupbearer to the king of Kish, he was subsequently appointed to the position of gardener, which gave him the vital responsibility of clearing the irrigation canals that allowed enough food to be grown in the hot Mesopotamian climate. This gave Sargon access to a disciplined corps of workers who became the foundation of a personal army, eventually allowing him to seize the throne in 2334 BCE.

Sargon was ruler of one of several kingdoms throughout Mesopotamia, but he had higher ambitions. Aside from conquering his Sumerian rival to the south, he embarked on a series of invasions of nearby territory, seizing land and amalgamating it into an empire that he ruled from his capital, Akkad. His armies ventured westwards into Syria and Canaan, reaching the Mediterranean Sea and perhaps even stretching across the water to Cyprus. To the east, the Elamite cities and kingdoms of modern Iran came under Akkadian control. To the north, Sargon claimed land as far as the mountains of Anatolia (modern Turkey), while to the south his influence reached to Magan (modern Oman).

The outposts of the Akkadian Empire did not always accept Sargon's rule without question. Rebellions flared in Elam and Assyria, but the imperial armies ruthlessly quashed any opposition and installed loyal Akkadian governors to control those they vanquished.

The Akkadian Empire ruthlessly subdued all opposition in Mesopotamia, but also tried to assimilate those it conquered



That Sargon was able to build and maintain a grip on such a vast domain was undoubtedly helped by his longevity - he sat on the throne for 56 years - but the empire continued to grow under his successors. Some degree of instability was inevitable after the death of a king who had ruled so successfully for so long, but two of Sargon's sons, Rimush and Manishtushu, faced down further revolts and rebellions. Indeed, both Rimush and Manishtushu actually suffered more from internal threats than from the wider empire - both were assassinated by courtiers in palace conspiracies.

By the time Naram-Sin, Manishtushu's son and successor, acceded the throne in 2254 BCE, the Akkadian Empire was ready to resume a policy of conquest. The Syrian kingdoms of Ebla and Armanum fell to the new king, while his forces ventured further into Anatolia and battled the Hittites. Naram-Sin's 36 years on the throne saw the empire reach its greatest extent and coincided with a second golden age of conquest.

Yet the Akkadian Empire was more than just a powerful military force. It had a sophisticated economy, although it was almost entirely dependent upon agriculture. Two belts of fertile land made it the breadbasket of the region - one in northern Mesopotamia that was fed by rainfall and one in the south that relied upon irrigation canals to remain productive. Grain and oil rations

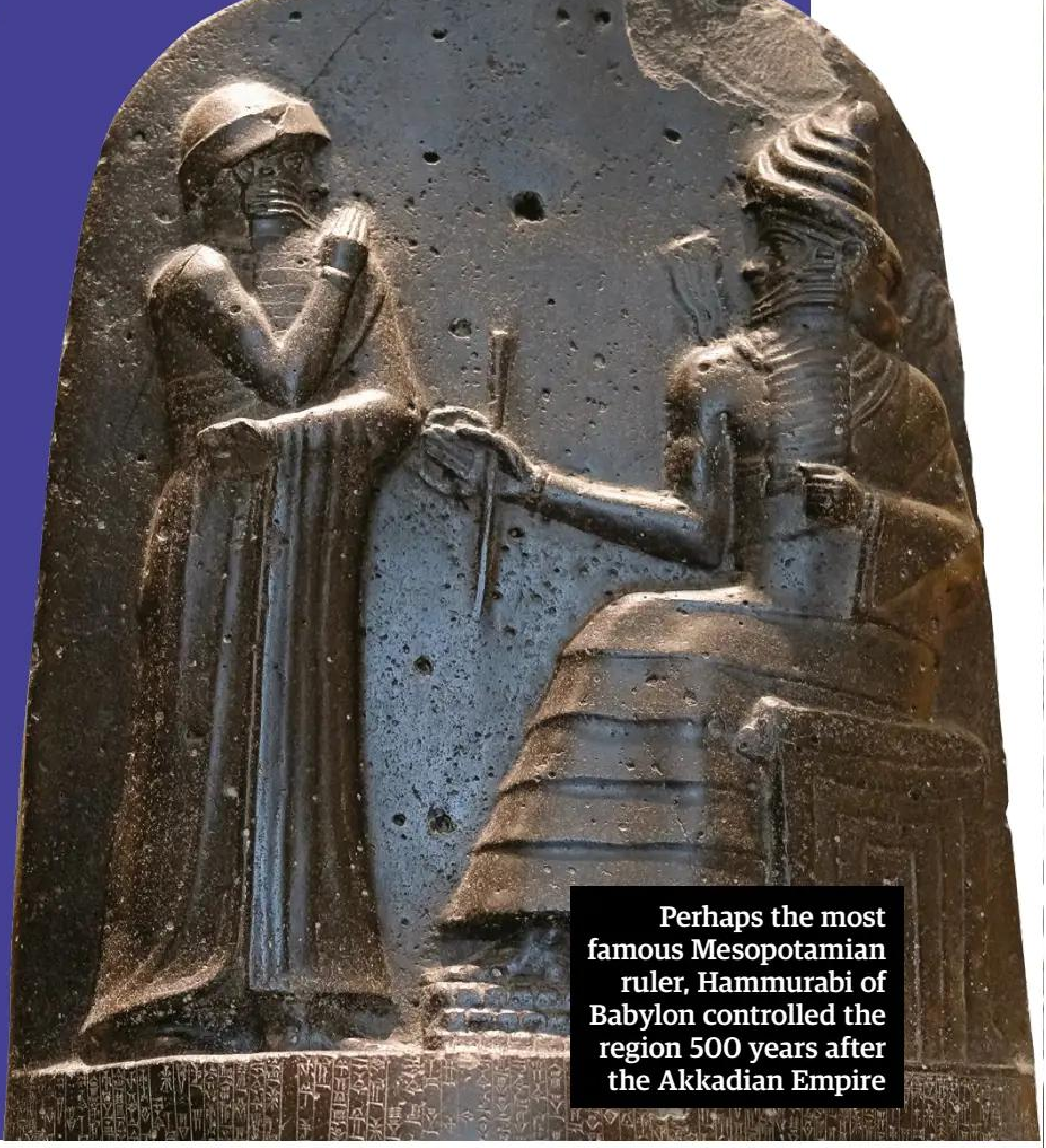
THE BATTLEGROUND OF EMPIRES

Uncover Mesopotamia, the land that was fought over by a succession of ancient empires

Conflict in Iraq is, unfortunately, nothing new. The brief flourishing of the Akkadian Empire in Mesopotamia was followed by a Dark Age under the Gutians, with few written documents to shine a light on the era. However, the peoples of the former Akkadian Empire eventually coalesced into two long-lived nations: Assyria in the north and Babylonia in the south.

Babylon fell in 539 BCE, when it was conquered by the Achaemenid Empire - the first of the Persian incursions from the east. The next set of invaders came from the west in the form of Alexander the Great in 332 BCE, after whose death Mesopotamia became part of the Greek Seleucid Empire.

By 150 BCE, the pendulum had swung back to the east as Mesopotamia came under the control of the Parthian Empire. The fertile land between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers was a scene of conflict between Romans and Parthians for centuries, eventually being split between Roman Byzantines in the west and Sassanid Persians in the east until the Muslim conquest of the Levant in the first half of the 7th century. Barring Mongol invasions, the battleground of empires was finally at peace until the 20th century.



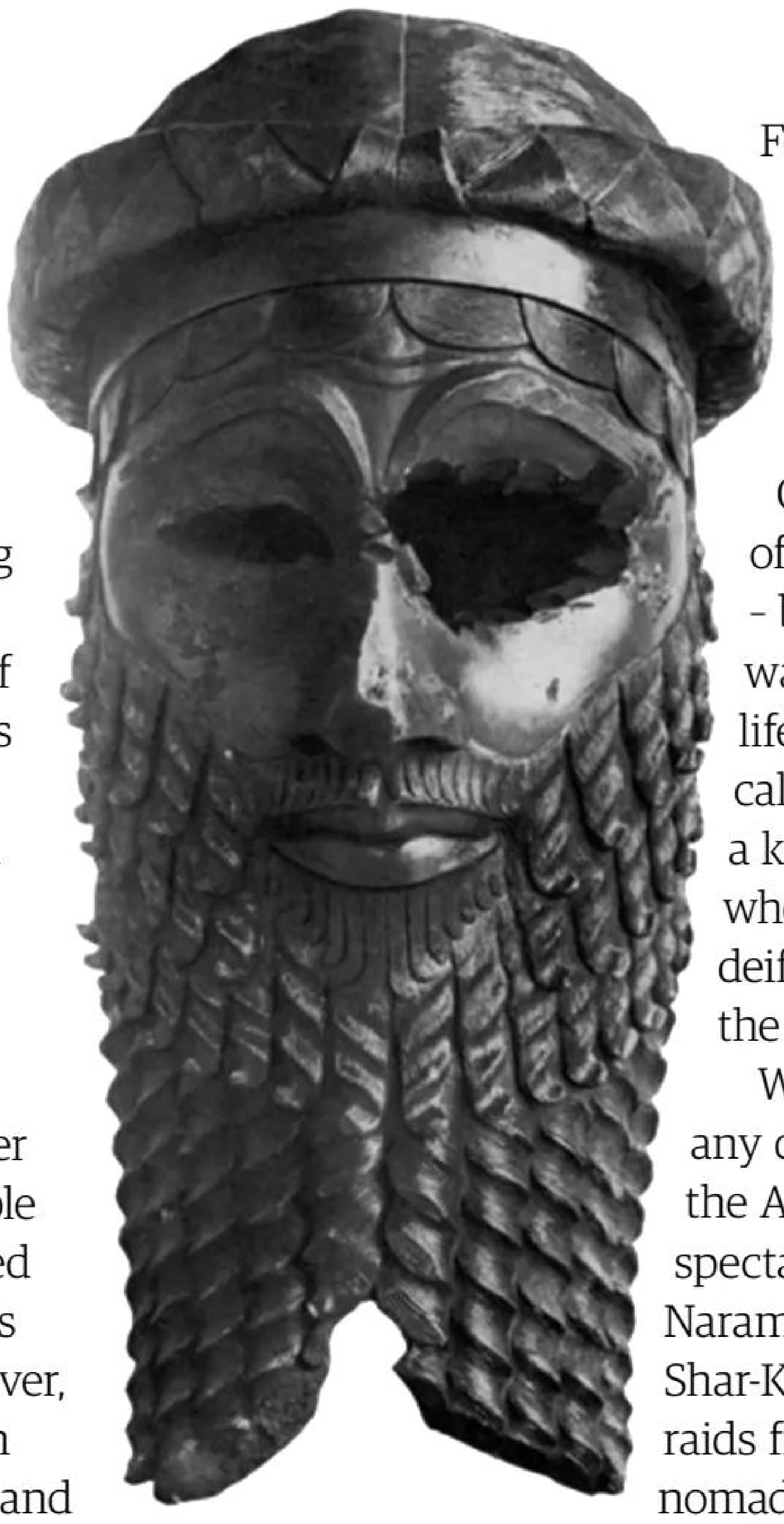
Perhaps the most famous Mesopotamian ruler, Hammurabi of Babylon controlled the region 500 years after the Akkadian Empire

Cylinder seals, such as this one depicting a seated god of water and wisdom, were used to seal letters in the Akkadian postal system were controlled by the state and distributed in standardised vessels. Where shortages occurred in one area, another could make up the shortfall.

Taxes could be paid either in produce or in kind by labouring on public projects, such as building city walls and temples or carrying out the vital autumnal clearance of irrigation ditches. Nomadic farmers could graze sheep and goats near the canals but had to pay a levy in wool, meat, milk and cheese.

Although the Akkadian Empire generally benefited from a surplus of foodstuffs, it was short of other resources, particularly metal, timber and stone. A desire to secure reliable supplies of these in part contributed to Akkadian conquests. The Taurus Mountains of Anatolia provided silver, while copper ore could be found in Magan, lapis lazuli in Afghanistan and timber in Lebanon.

In order to secure their family's place on the throne, the Akkadian monarchs made full use of their wider family as a strategic network of control. They installed their sons as provincial governors and married their daughters to other rulers of imperial territory. Two daughters of Sargon and Naram-Sin were also appointed as high priestess to Sin, meaning that their family's power would be felt as far south as the influential Sumerian temple complex of Ur.



This life-size bronze head housed in the National Museum of Iraq is thought to depict either Sargon or Naram-Sin

The Akkadians also attempted to assimilate their conquests to create a single, consolidated nation. Akkadian became the primary language of Mesopotamia, although many of its people were bilingual and continued to speak Sumerian. Communication across the empire was possible through a road network that also supported a postal service. Clay tablets inscribed with Akkadian script were wrapped in outer clay envelopes marked with the name and address of the recipient and the seal of the sender; only the intended recipient was supposed to break the envelope to reveal the contents. A calendar based on year names, where each year of a reign was named after an event performed by the king, was adopted across Mesopotamia.

What we don't know a great deal about, however, is the capital itself. The location of Akkad is still shrouded in mystery. The name 'Akkad' does not derive from the Akkadian language, suggesting that the city existed prior to Sargon and the rise of his empire. The most likely site is on the Tigris River, somewhere between the modern cities of Samarra and Baghdad – however, that still leaves more than 80 miles to explore.

Wherever his palace was located, such was Naram-Sin's power as the self-titled king of the Four Quarters that he was elevated to the status of a god and granted his own temple establishment. The deification of a ruler was not new – it had happened to Gilgamesh, who ruled as king of Urk a few centuries previously – but it was the first time a king was considered a god during his lifetime. However, an ancient text called the Curse of Agade tells of a king, thought to be Naram-Sin, who angered the gods through his deification and by tearing down the Temple of Enlil in Nippur.

Whether or not there was any divine retribution involved, the Akkadian Empire collapsed spectacularly just 64 years after Naram-Sin's death. Naram-Sin's son, Shar-Kali-Sharri, faced increasing raids from the Guti in Sumeria. This nomadic people lived in the Zagros Mountains and proved stubbornly determined to carry out hit-and-run raids against Akkadian targets. Faced with a new type of enemy who did not have a city-state base that could fall to the Akkadian army, the Guti slowly crippled the Akkadian economy. High taxes were imposed to pay for ongoing military campaigns against the Guti, leading to unrest and rebellion in the rest of the empire.

By the time Shar-Kali-Sharri died without an heir, the Akkadian Empire had fallen back to a rump around the capital and three years of anarchy left the throne unclaimed. The civil war was won by Dudu, who was succeeded by his son, Shu-Turul. However, neither king was able to prevent the eventual loss of Akkad to the Guti.

One explanation for the sudden collapse of the once-great empire was that it relied on personal leadership. Sargon and Naram-Sin may have had the capability of building and holding onto vast territories, but the other kings who sat on the throne did not have the same aptitude. However, some scientists have suggested an alternative explanation – that the final years of the Akkadian period coincided with a long drought caused by declining rainfall.

Archaeological evidence indicates that several cities in Sumer were abandoned in the late Akkadian period. Excavations at Tell Leilan in Syria show that massive city walls and a temple were built when times were good, but that soon after all trace of human activity in the city of 28,000 people disappeared. Soil samples indicate that the fine sand covered the ground with no trace of the earthworm activity usually found in fertile soil. At a similar time, the nearby city of Tell Brak shrank in size by 75 per cent.

If a similar story played out across Mesopotamia, the economy of the Akkadian Empire would have gone into freefall. Agrarian output would have plummeted and trade would have collapsed as people moved away from urban areas in a desperate search for reliable water. Centralised control of a vast empire became impossible and loyalty to Akkad would have evaporated as quickly as the water.

Whatever the cause of its spectacular collapse, the Akkadian Empire remains the world's first; a brief but historic milestone. It makes Sargon the forebear of later illustrious emperors including Augustus and Genghis Khan – not a bad achievement for a former royal cupbearer.

An inscription at the base of the Bassetki Statue, unearthed in the 1960s, indicates that it once stood in a doorway of Naram-Sin's palace

THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

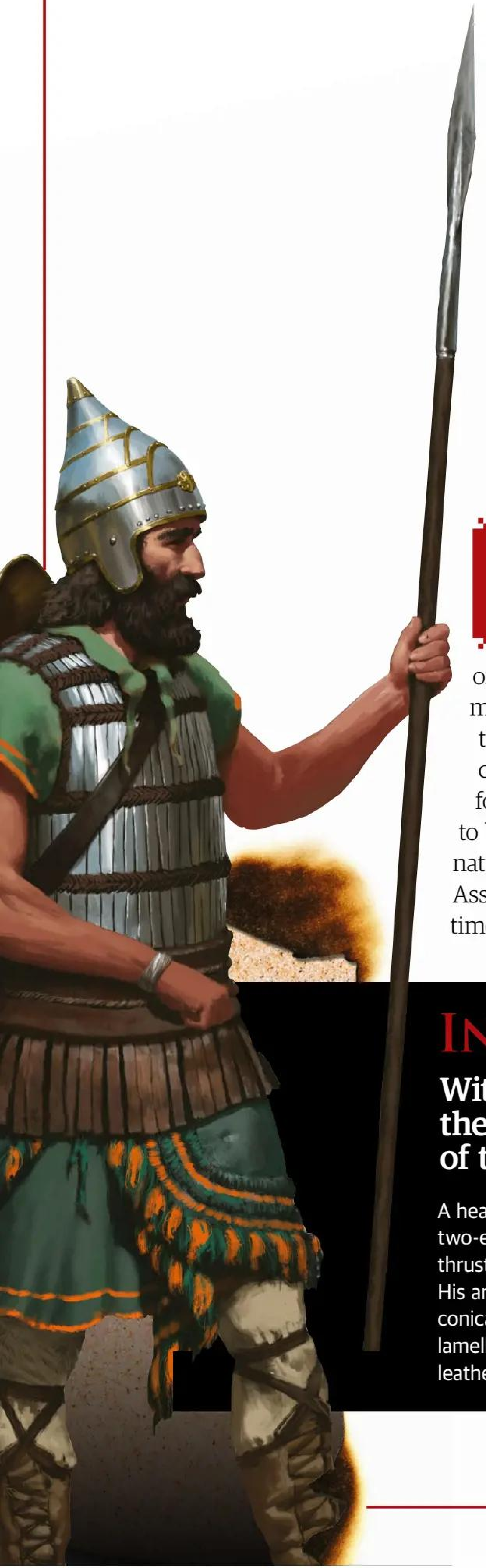
Discover the greatest army of the Iron Age Middle East, and how it almost captured Jerusalem

Written by Marcel Serr

The Assyrian Empire originated on the upper Tigris River between the cities of Nimrud, Nineveh and Ashur in what is now known as the northwest of Iraq. The geo-strategic position of its mainland was somewhat precarious, because the area lacked wood and usable stone for construction purposes, as well as iron ore for the production of weapons, and steppes to breed horses. The topography provided no natural barriers for invaders, meaning that if Assyria wanted to survive for any length of time, it had to conquer its neighbours.

In the 9th century BCE it expanded its territory extensively and emerged as the dominant power of the Middle East. 100 years later, Tiglath-Pileser III seized the Assyrian crown and killed the royal family. Not only was he an excellent administrative and military reformer, but a gifted general who conquered most of the Middle East. The Assyrian army was the major instrument facilitating this expansion. Tiglath-Pileser reformed the force, providing it with a strong backbone of professional, full-time soldiers supported by contingents from conquered realms. Commanding a standing army, the Assyrians were able to wage war all year long and to field a force of 150,000 to 200,000 men.

This army was the first to be mainly equipped with iron weapons and armour. Iron metallurgy had probably been invented by the Hittites around 1300 BCE and had spread in the following centuries. Compared with bronze, it was a superior material because cold forging created stronger and more reliable arms. A few centuries later, the discovery of tempering made iron the best material for arms production. The widespread availability of iron ore decreased production costs, making it even more attractive. Even minor powers were able to muster and equip formidable forces with affordable, reliable weapons. It's no wonder that wars then became much more frequent, and the Assyrians fully exploited the possibilities of this new Iron Age.



INFANTRYMEN

With their spears and shields, these men made up the bulk of the Assyrian army

A heavy infantryman would be armed with a two-edged lance, to be wielded as a close-range thrusting weapon, as well as with a straight sword. His armour consisted of the characteristic Assyrian conical iron helmets, knee-long fringed coats and lamellar body armour. The shield was a cone of leather, edged and embossed with bronze.

The ancient Assyrians fielded a complex combined-arms fighting force consisting of infantry, chariots, cavalry, sappers and auxiliaries. The king acted as supreme commander and usually led the campaigns. The heavy infantrymen provided the bulk of the army, supported by archers, slingers and shield bearers. The archers were considered particularly dangerous because their iron arrowheads easily penetrated the enemy armour, while the invention of the quiver increased their shot frequency immensely.

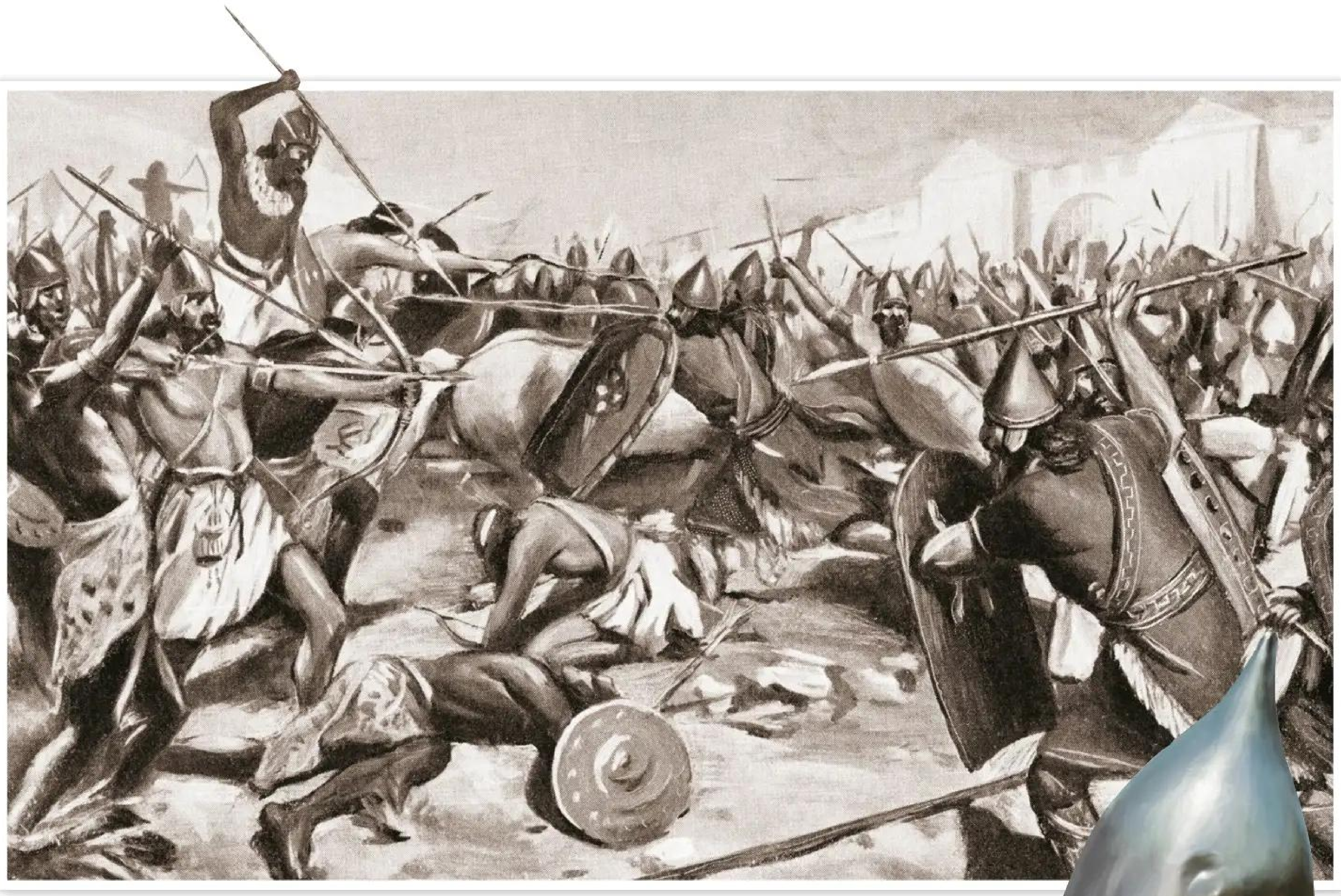
Cavalry and war chariots formed elite equestrian forces. Chariots were manned by a driver, an archer and a shield bearer, serving as mobile artillery, and if the terrain was suitable, they were deployed as shock troops against the enemy's infantry ranks. When mounted archers were finally introduced in the 9th century BCE, the cavalry became increasingly important.

The difficult terrain of the Levant reduced the efficiency of chariots, paving the way for the cavalry as the new heart of the Assyrian offense. In the 7th century BCE, the cavalry had developed into a heavily armed and protected combat troop. The horses represented a high strategic value, which is why the Assyrians invested a lot of effort and resources into breeding, feeding and training.

In open battles, the heavy infantry – joined by archers, slingers and shield bearers – took the centre of the Assyrian line, with cavalry and chariot forces being deployed at the flanks. The battle formation was more than 2,000 metres long and almost 100 metres deep. The archers and slingers usually opened the battle with long-range shots. Afterwards, the chariots and cavalry pushed forward – the chariots were supposed to crush through the enemy's lines, while the cavalry was to exploit the breaches and roll up the enemy's battle. Then the infantry would deal the final blow.

These armies also excelled in the art of siege warfare. A typical siege began with a complete lockdown of the targeted city, then the generals examined the defence systems and searched for weak spots – usually the city gates. The besieger first prepared huge earth ramps at the identified points to overcome the glacis, and then put the siege engines to work. Mounted on wheels, these consisted of a battering ram with an iron pike and a siege tower, the top of which was covered by hides that were kept wet at all times in order to prevent the structure from catching fire. The tower was manned by archers bombarding the walls and defenders with arrows.

Psychosocial warfare also played a part: the Assyrians were infamous for their brutality after capturing a defiant city, which meant that even the sight of an Assyrian army taking position in front of a city sufficed to make its inhabitants surrender. To control the lands he conquered, the Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pileser III, introduced mass deportation as a regular policy, thereby removing the enemy's elite, who were the most likely to instigate a rebellion. Areas that had been politically decapitated in such a way were easier to rule.



The might of the Assyrian and Egyptian armies were smashed by Babylonia at the Battle of Carchemish

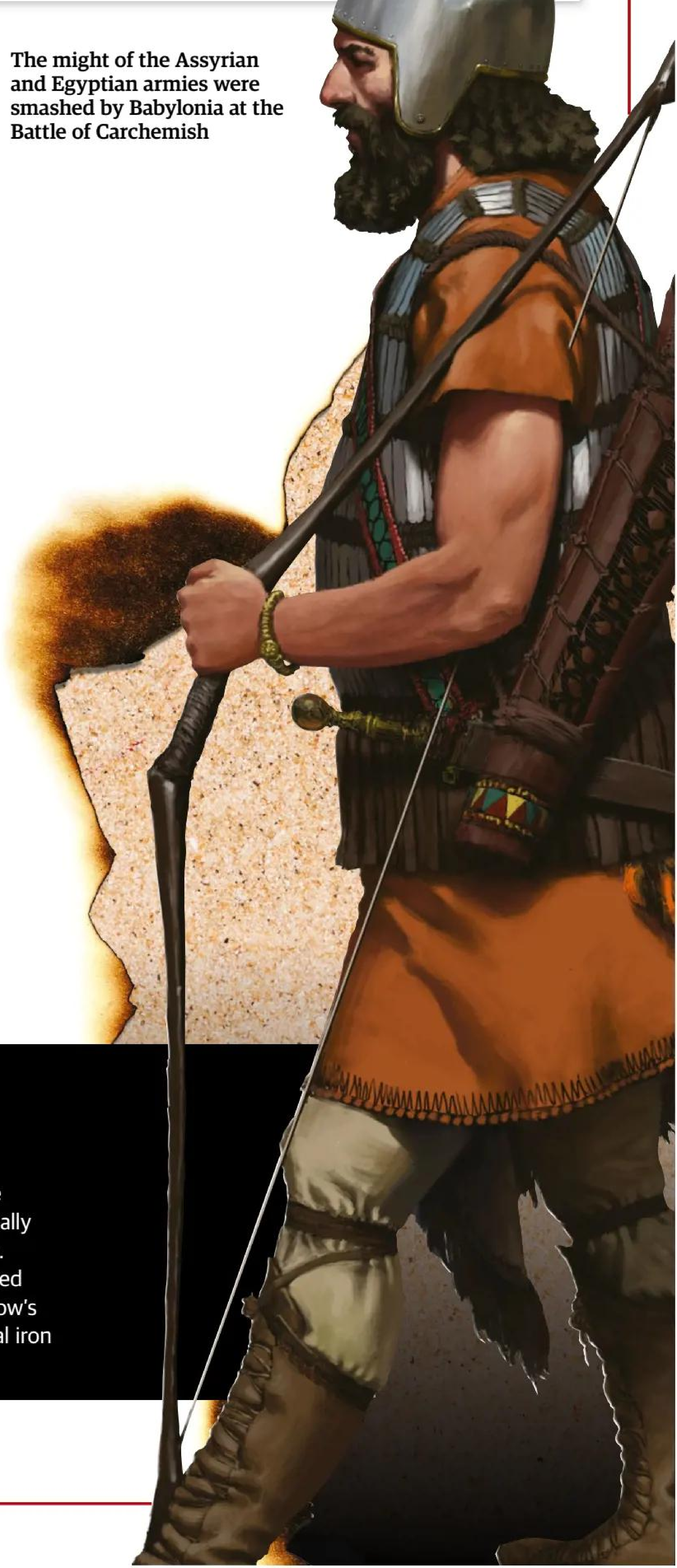
The Hebrew kingdoms

In the 9th century BCE, the Assyrian Empire became a regional great power of the Middle East and expanded towards the Levant. King Shalmaneser III conducted 21 campaigns during his reign of 35 years, establishing Assyrian dominance from Babylon to the coast of the Mediterranean. At that time, the small city states and kingdoms of the Levant experienced a period of political power and economic wealth. Among those realms were the Hebrew kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the land of today's State of Israel.

Under the legendary rule of monarchs David and Solomon in the 10th century BCE, a unified kingdom had formed. However, at the end of the century they separated: Israel in the north with its capital Samaria (today's Sebastiya in the West Bank) was ruled by changing dynasties, whereas Judah in the south was controlled from Jerusalem by the descendants of David.

Most of the time, both kingdoms were fighting each other – with Israel usually dominating due to a larger population and better agricultural conditions. But both prospered in the 9th century, and the territorial expansion of the Assyrians was an existential threat looming over the Levant. A war remained only a question of time.

Israel and Judah both probably commanded small standing armies, but their methods of



ARCHERS

Bringing deadly shots from afar

Although sometimes simple bows were used, the composite bow was the Assyrians' main offensive weapon. Archers usually operated in pairs with the second man being a shield bearer. The shields made of reeds were bigger than a man and curved on the top in order to protect the archers. The composite bow's shot range was 600 metres. Archers wore the typical conical iron helmet of the early 7th century with hinged earpieces.

recruitment and organisation are obscure. The armies most likely mainly consisted of infantry supported by a limited number of chariots and cavalry units. The infantrymen were armed with javelins, swords and shields, and accompanied by archers and slingers.

For small kingdoms like Israel and Judah, it was essential to form military alliances against great powers - they rarely conducted major offensive campaigns by themselves. Most military activities focused on the preparation for sieges and the construction of fortifications. First and foremost, securing the water supply was essential to survival. Springs often originated outside the city walls, making the construction of elaborate water systems essential. The Israelites and Judeans dug immense tunnel systems to secure their access to springs. Until today, visitors of Megiddo, Hazor, and Jerusalem have marvelled at the advanced engineering skills that was invested in those infrastructure projects.

The city walls, constructed of worked ashlar blocks (or mud bricks dating back to the Bronze Age) on a steep artificial mound (glacis), were also an important factor. In the early Iron Age, they had consisted of nothing more than the outfacing walls of private dwellings. In the 10th century, however, casemate walls prevailed - a kind of rampart that had two parallel walls with intersections. The space between the outer and inner walls accommodated soldiers or supplies in peacetime. During a siege, defenders filled this with earth to strengthen the rampart. Since the 9th century BCE, massive walls with towers and bastions had become common.

This innovative defence was probably caused by siege technique. Before the Assyrians in the Levant, attackers had captured cities or strongholds through ladder assaults, with the defenders on their walls enjoying a tactical advantage. As long as a city or a fortress had enough supplies in store, the defenders could simply wait until the attackers ran out of money or patience.

However, the Assyrians changed siege warfare fundamentally through the introduction of new weapon systems and tactics. Straight walls provided the ideal target for the Assyrian tactics, whereas ramparts with advancing towers and battlements presented less vulnerable attack points and gave the defenders the opportunity to take the attackers in crossfire.

The Assyrian attack on the Levant

Facing the Assyrian threat, 11 Levantine kingdoms formed a defensive alliance. In 853 BCE, Assyrian ruler Shalmaneser III faced the coalition in the famous battle of Qarqar (today's Tell Qarqur) at the shore of the Orontes River in modern-day northwestern Syria - one of the biggest battles ever fought until then. He led an army of over 70,000

THE SOURCES

Written and archaeological sources paint a colourful picture of wars and warfare in the time of the Assyrian domination of the Middle East

The Old Testament (in particular the books Kings and Chronicles) tells the history of the Hebrew kingdoms of Israel and Judah from the 10th to the 7th century BCE. Although the story is a little biased - especially when it comes to the enemies of the Hebrews - it still remains a valuable source from the period.

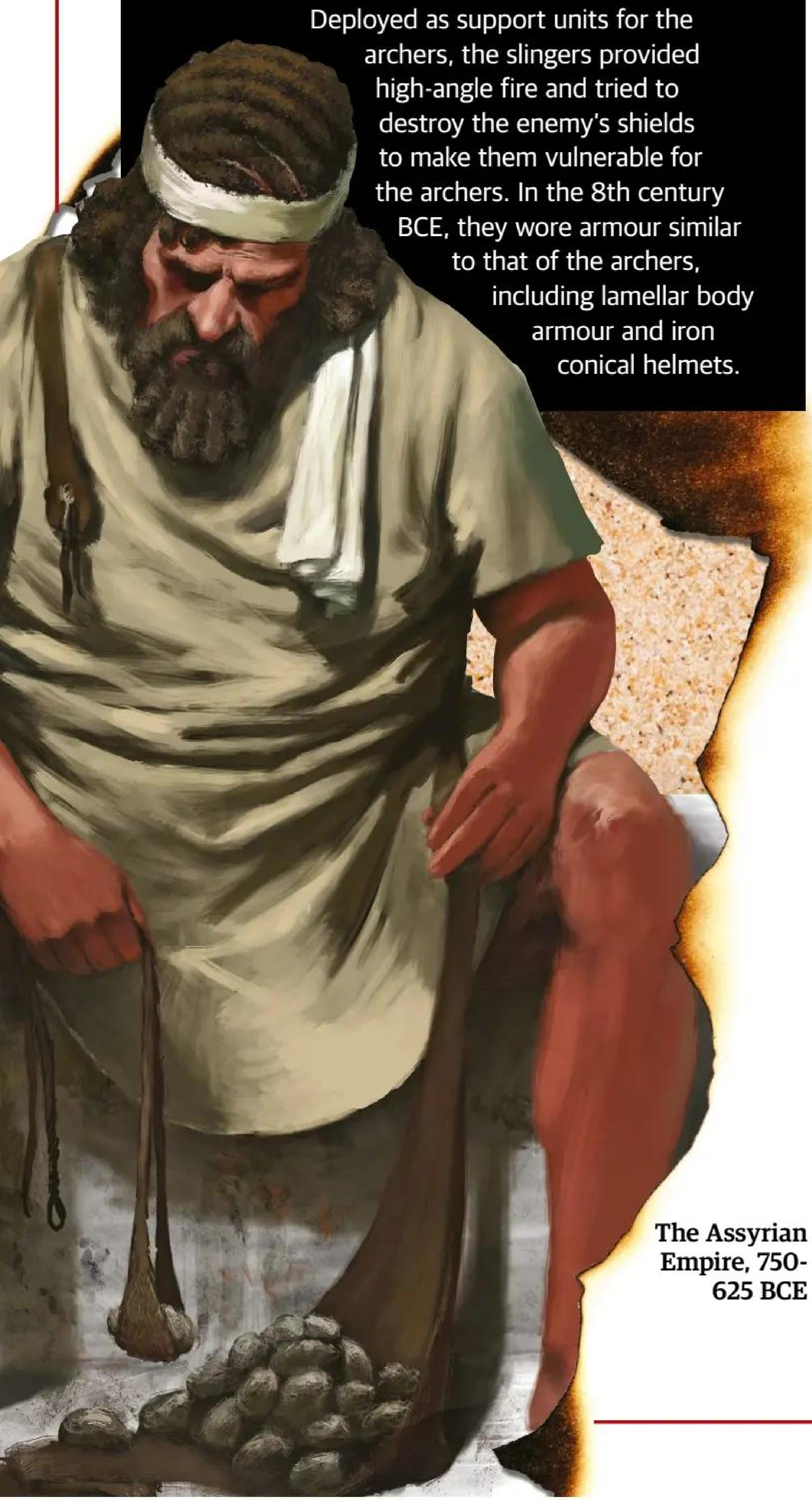
Assyrian sources present us with the other side of the story. There are numerous written records that keep much closer to the events than the Bible. The annals of the kings and the eponyms (lists of important Assyrian officials) provide specific information about rulers and events. However, these were mainly produced as Assyrian propaganda and are therefore far from unbiased in their account.

Finally, archaeology adds important insights as well, as the traces of war and destruction are still visible today. The excavation of ancient cities like Megiddo, Hazor and Lachish in modern Israel bring back to life the devastation of Assyrian siege warfare. Findings of weapons, fortifications and the traces of siege engines help us to understand the events that took place 2,700 years ago. A huge relief depicting the Assyrian capture of the Judean city of Lachish in 701 BCE, which was unearthed in the Assyrian capital Nineveh, presents a unique opportunity to study not only warfare techniques, but the appearance of soldiers and weapons as well.

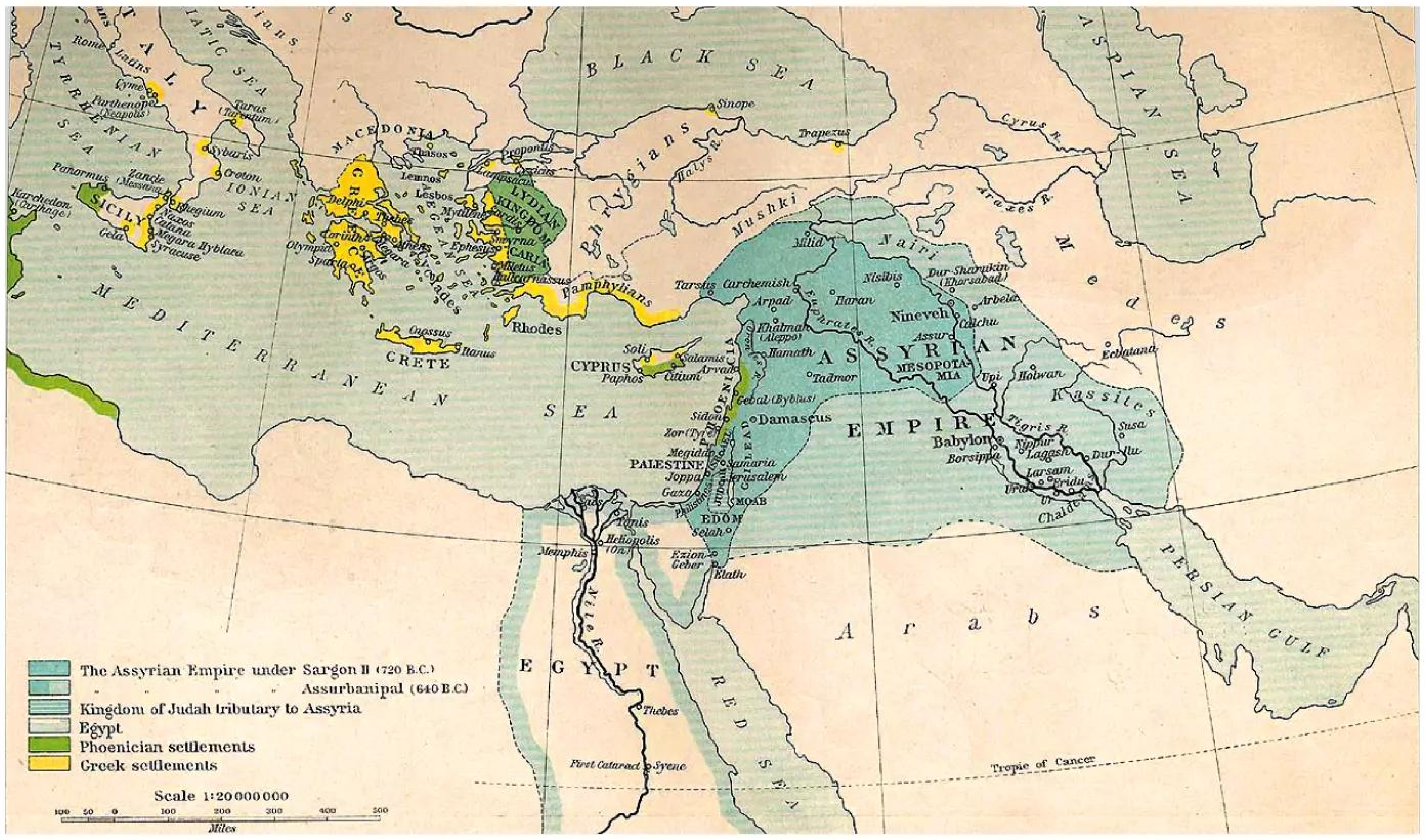
The Jerusalem Prism (shown in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem) contains Sennacherib's annals written in Akkadian. In the inscription, the Assyrian king presents his military campaigns, among them the war against the Judean king Hezekiah that has also been recorded in the Bible

SLINGERS

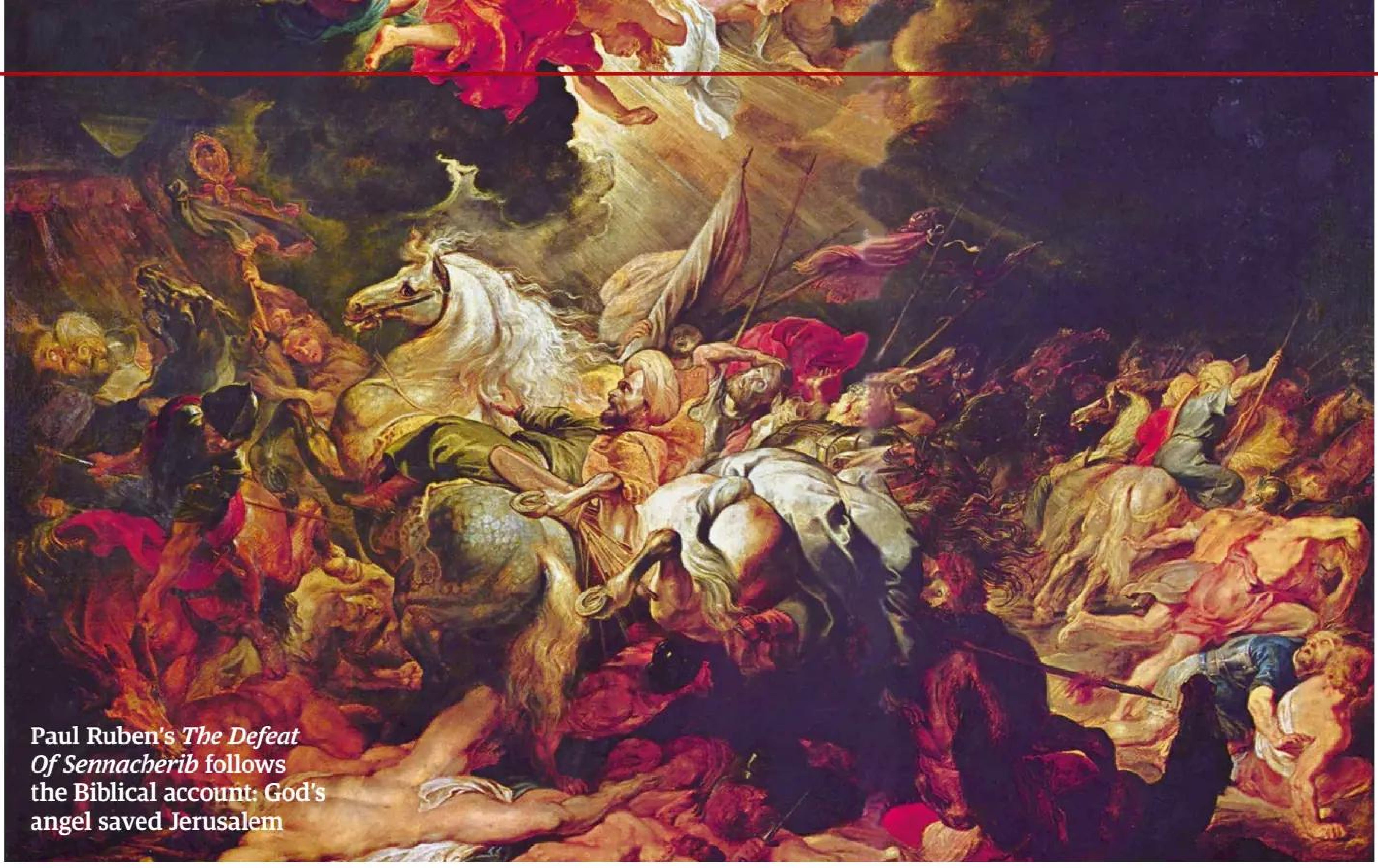
In the early days of the Assyrian Empire, these men wore no armour or footwear but were still lethal



Deployed as support units for the archers, the slingers provided high-angle fire and tried to destroy the enemy's shields to make them vulnerable for the archers. In the 8th century BCE, they wore armour similar to that of the archers, including lamellar body armour and iron conical helmets.



The Assyrian Empire, 750-625 BCE



Paul Ruben's *The Defeat Of Sennacherib* follows the Biblical account: God's angel saved Jerusalem

men to the battlefield, including 1,200 cavalrymen and 4,000 chariots.

The anti-Assyrian alliance had mustered a formidable force as well. Contemporary sources tell the story of a bloody fight with thousands of soldiers dead. Assyrian accounts present Shalmaneser as the victor, but this is doubtable and was probably Assyrian propaganda because Shalmaneser was hesitating to move further south for years. It took him three more attempts to break the anti-Assyrian alliance and conquer the southern Levant in the 840s BCE. In the end, internal struggles between the Levantine allies brought the coalition down, giving the Assyrians a chance to fight the kingdoms one by one.

The following 150 years saw conflicts between the kingdoms of the Levant and rebellions against the Assyrians. Israel and Judah survived as Assyrian vassals for a time, but Israel pushed its luck too far by trying to play Assyria and Egypt off against each other. Assyria didn't hesitate to crush Israel in 722 BCE. To neutralise an annoying threat in a strategically important buffer area between Mesopotamia and Egypt, the Assyrians deported tens of thousands of inhabitants and resettled people from other parts of the empire there – this was the end of the kingdom of Israel.

The southern Hebrew kingdom, Judah, ruled by King Hezekiah from 725 to 698 BCE, didn't follow Israel into the rebellion and was now rewarded by years of political stability, prosperity and even expansion. But when the Assyrian king Sargon II died in 705 BCE, Hezekiah made the crucial mistake of joining the series of rebellions that broke loose in every corner of the Assyrian Empire. As soon as the new Assyrian king, Sennacherib, consolidated his position at home, he set his army in motion towards the Levant.

Sieges of Lachish and Jerusalem

Sennacherib's campaign against the southern Levant in 701 BCE is one of the most well-documented military events of the Iron Age. Not only can historians rely on the annals of the Assyrian king and the biblical account, but there are also plenty of archaeological remains.

Hezekiah prepared for the consequences of his decisions. He knew that Sennacherib would come for him and that his forces would not stand a chance in open battle, so he had his cities and strongholds readied for protracted sieges – above all, his capital at Jerusalem. He extended the city wall, including new quarters of Jerusalem on today's Mount Zion. In addition, he secured the water supply of the city by the construction of a 550-metre-long tunnel that diverted the water from Jerusalem's only spring, the Gihon, to a huge pool inside the city walls.

Sennacherib pushed along the Mediterranean coast and swept away any attempt at resistance. An increasing number of cities surrendered before it came to a fight. Eventually, Sennacherib turned towards Judah and lay siege to the heavily fortified city of Lachish. Excavations revealed a 60-metre-long ramp that the Assyrians had created from 19,000 tonnes of soil. Mass graves, hundreds of arrowheads and sling stones, and traces of a horrific fire in the city bear witness of the bloody battle and the destruction.

Despite intensive preparations, Lachish and 45 other Judean strongholds perished. Finally, Sennacherib moved towards Jerusalem, where he encircled the city according to Assyrian standard siege practice. Apparently it was just a matter of time until the Assyrian ruler would drive home another victory. Sennacherib's annals claim: "I locked him [Hezekiah] up within Jerusalem, his royal city, like a bird in a cage."

Suddenly, the Assyrians left. Hezekiah even stayed on his throne. According to the Bible, God sent an angel into the camp of the Assyrians, who had slain most of their army in one night – an indication of a deadly plague in the camp. Assyrian sources tell a different a story: Hezekiah paid a high tribute in order to save his city. Besides gold, silver and Judah's elite fighting troops, Sennacherib claimed he "took out 200,100 people... horses, mules, donkeys, and camels, cattle and sheep, without number, and counted them as spoil".

Another theory suggests that Sennacherib had to leave immediately because a rebellion had broken out in Babylonia. His withdrawal saved Jerusalem – at least for the time being. Judah, however, had suffered dearly from the political plunder of Hezekiah: the deportation of a considerable part of its population affected the economy and it took years for it to recover.

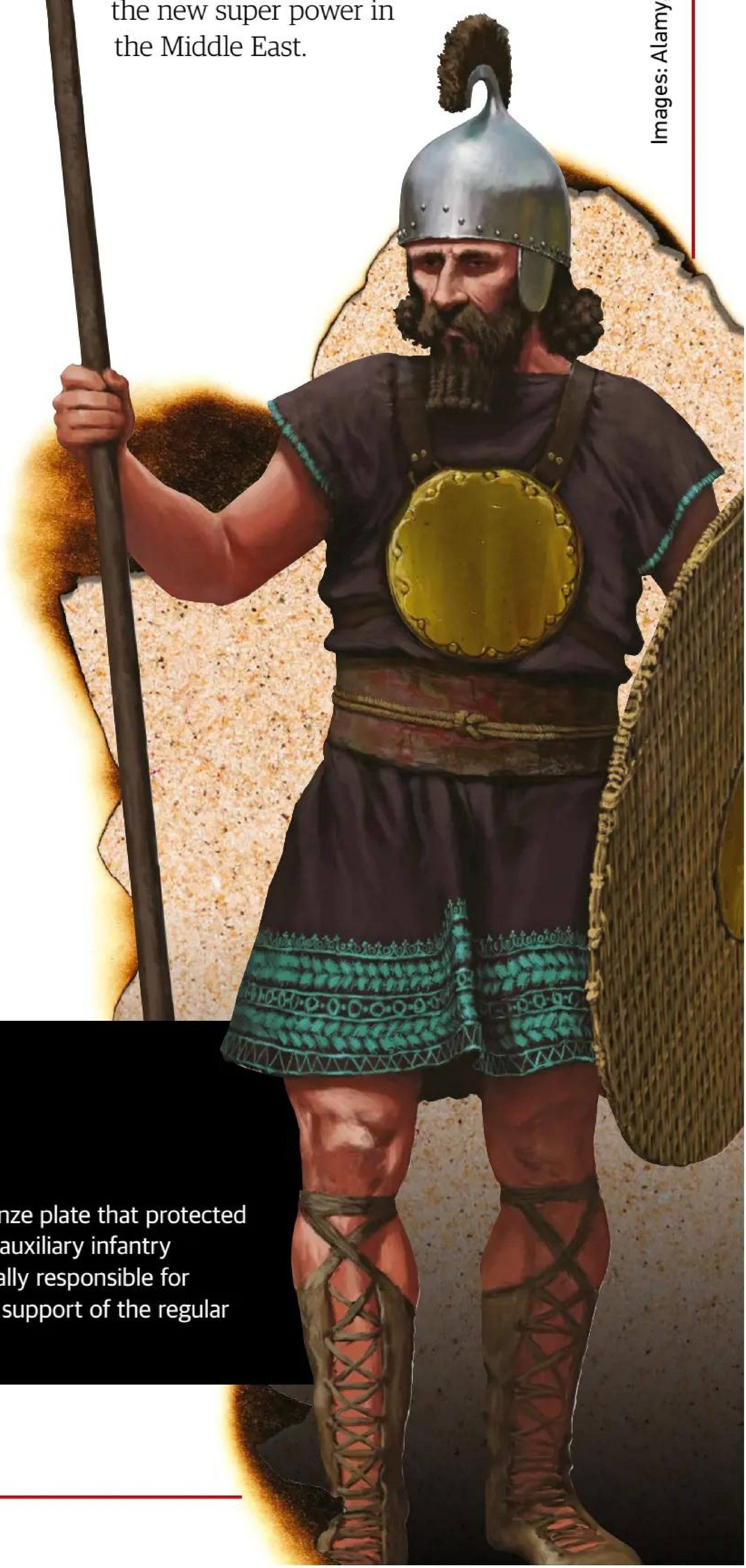
The Assyrian Empire reached its climax in the following decades with the conquest of Thebes, the capital of Egypt. However, internal power struggles led to its demise. At the end of the 7th century, Assyria fell to the rising power of Babylonia. Desperate, it formed an alliance with its long-term rival: Egypt.

During the Battle of Carchemish (in modern Syria) in 605 BCE, the Babylonian crown prince Nebuchadnezzar dealt the Assyrian Empire its final blow. In the following years, the Babylonian ruler conquered the entire Levant and established Babylon as the new super power in the Middle East.

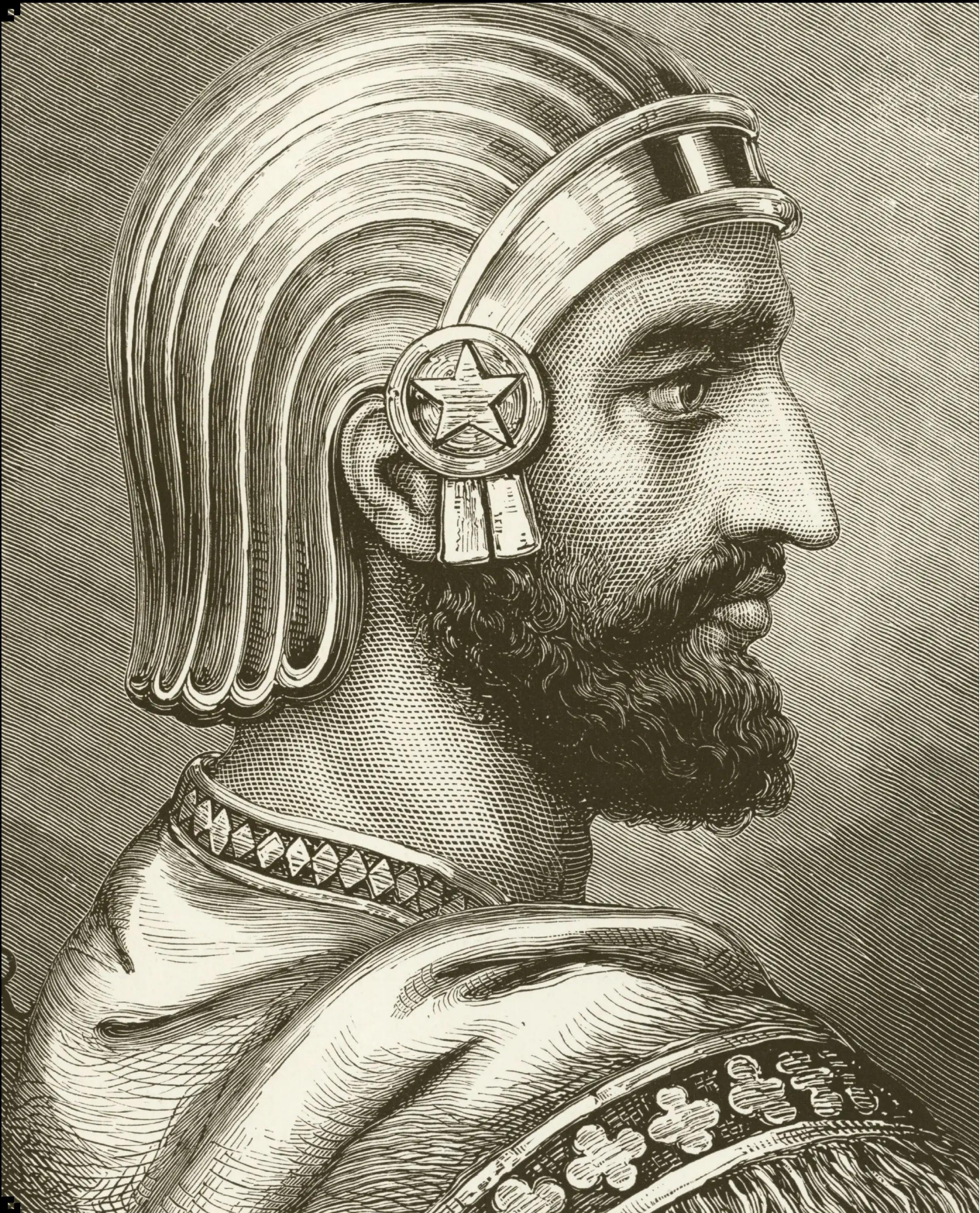
AUXILIARIES

A Hittite infantryman with a spear and a shield made of reeds

A particular feature of the Hittite troops was the round bronze plate that protected of the chest, and helmets with crests. Apart from that, the auxiliary infantry troops were largely unarmoured. Auxiliary troops were usually responsible for the occupation in the provinces and could be mustered for support of the regular Assyrian forces in the course of campaigns.



Images: Alamy, Jose Cabrera



THE ACHAEMENID EMPIRE

Cyrus the Great was much more than a ruthless conqueror who founded the Persian Empire – he was a brilliant and original administrator whose government actually worked

Written by John Man

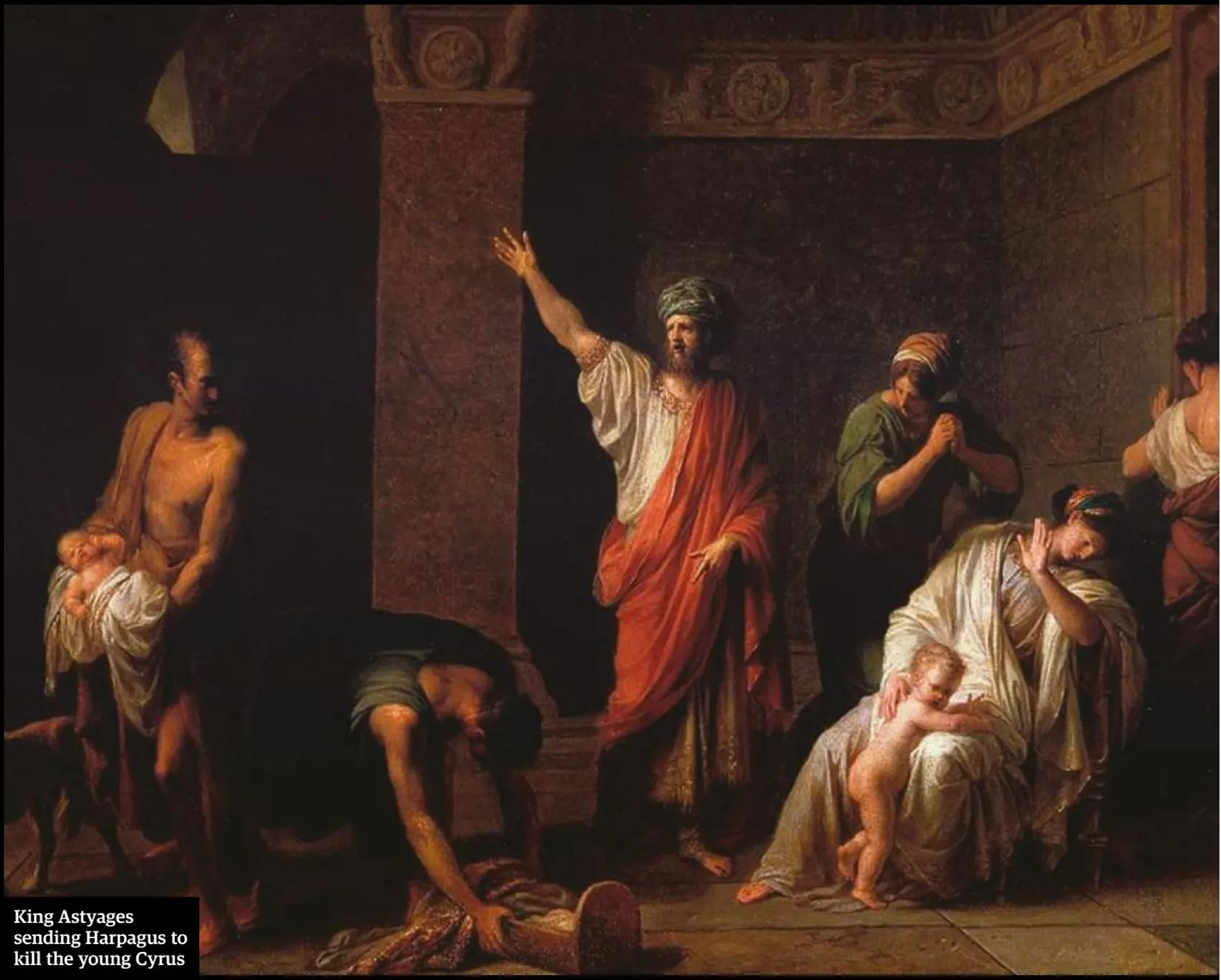
Cyrus the Great was the founder of one of the most impressive regimes of the ancient world, the Achaemenid Empire, which lasted for two centuries (550-330 BCE) until it was destroyed by Alexander the Great. Despite its significance, undisputed facts about Cyrus' conquests are thin on the ground. Scholars tease what they can from legend, from scattered cuneiform tablets, from brief, one-sided accounts in the Biblical Old Testament, and from Cyrus' own statement justifying his conquests.

Before Cyrus' time, Turkey and the rest of the Middle East was divided between three empires: Lydia in western Turkey; Media, which spread across to today's Central Asia; and Babylonia, spanning Iraq, Iran and the Mediterranean coast. The ancient Assyrian Empire had recently been divided between the Medes and the Babylonians. Away to the east and north, in the unknown heart of Asia, were the Scythians (also known as Saka), nomadic horsemen who lived in a shadowy world beyond the horizons of civilisation.

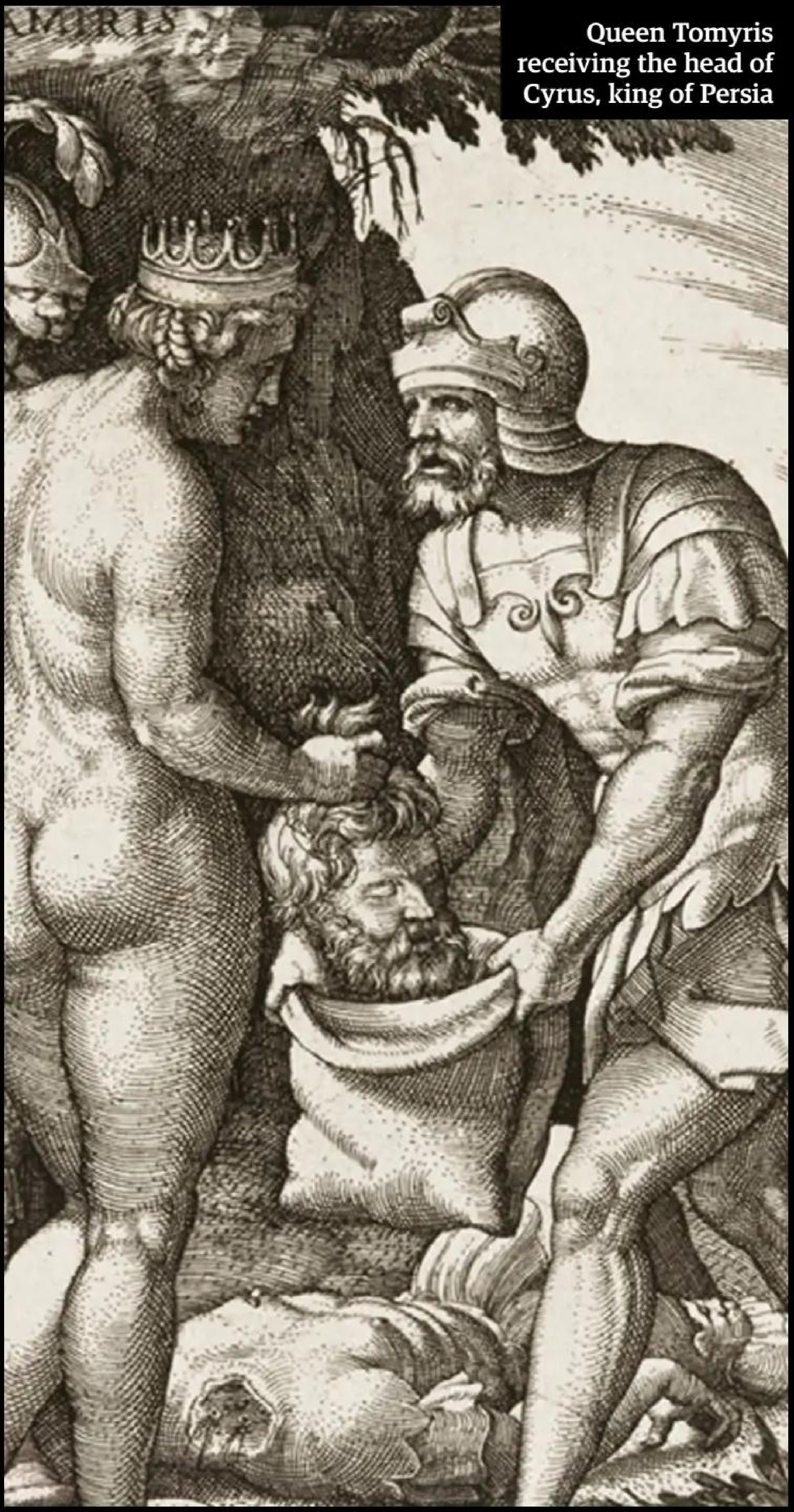
Cyrus' homeland, Persia, had been founded by his ancestor Achaemenes when his tribe emerged from inner Asia two centuries earlier. Cyrus, the seventh king of the Achaemenid dynasty, was born either in about 600 or 575 BCE – a 25-year difference that points to the unreliability of the available sources. When Cyrus was a child, Persia was an unremarkable dependency of the closely related Medes.

Herodotus, Greece's great historian and traveller, writing about 100 years later, told of Cyrus' rise. His grandfather, Astyages, king of the Medes, dreamt of a vine growing out of his genitals. Priests told him its meaning – that a descendant would overthrow him. His daughter, Mandane, was pregnant, so the king told a noble to kill the unborb baby. The noble delegated the task to a humble shepherd, who disobeyed, and ended up raising the child as his own. The truth came

A statue of Cyrus the Great in Germany



King Astyages sending Harpagus to kill the young Cyrus



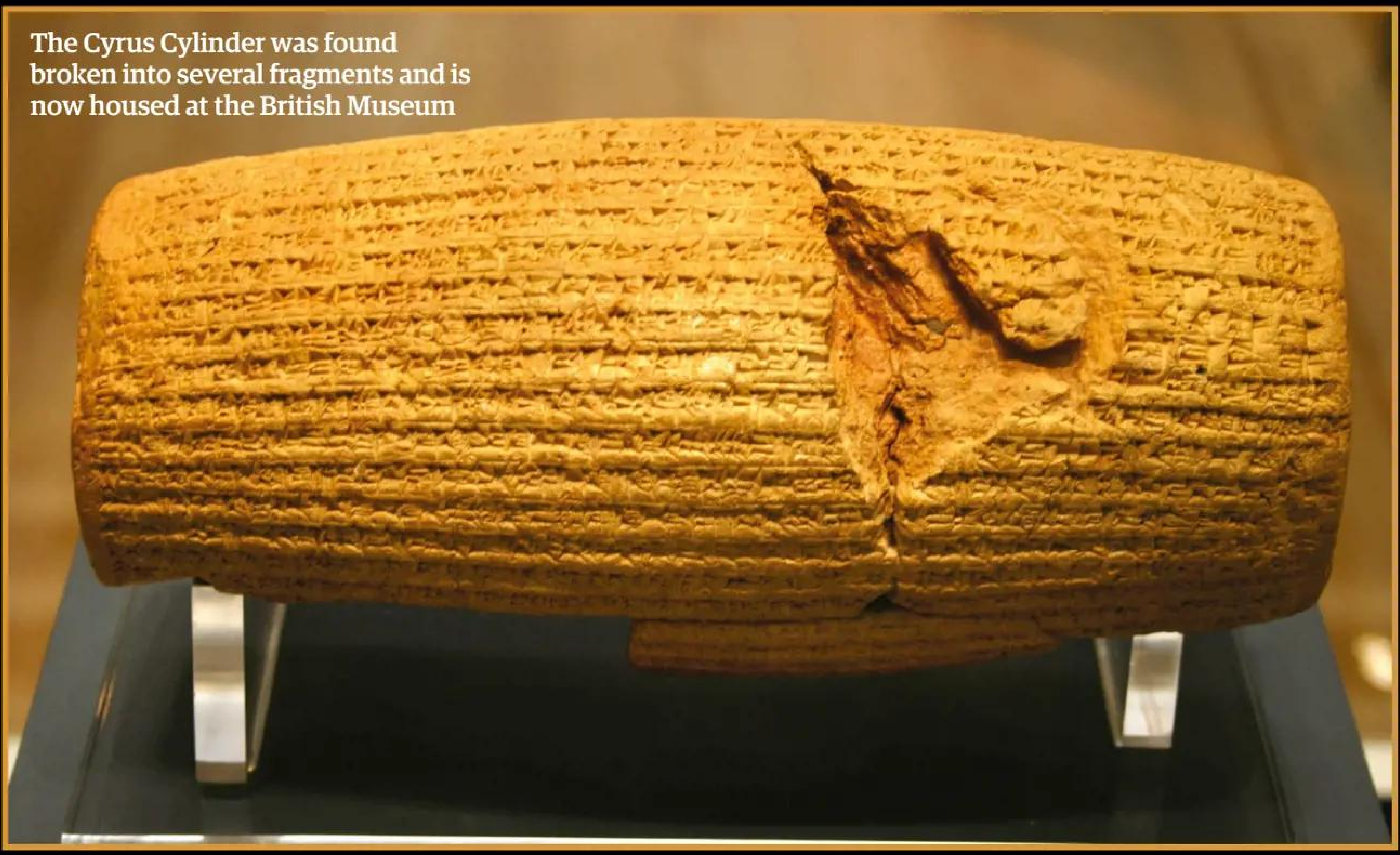
Queen Tomyris receiving the head of Cyrus, king of Persia

THE CYRUS CYLINDER

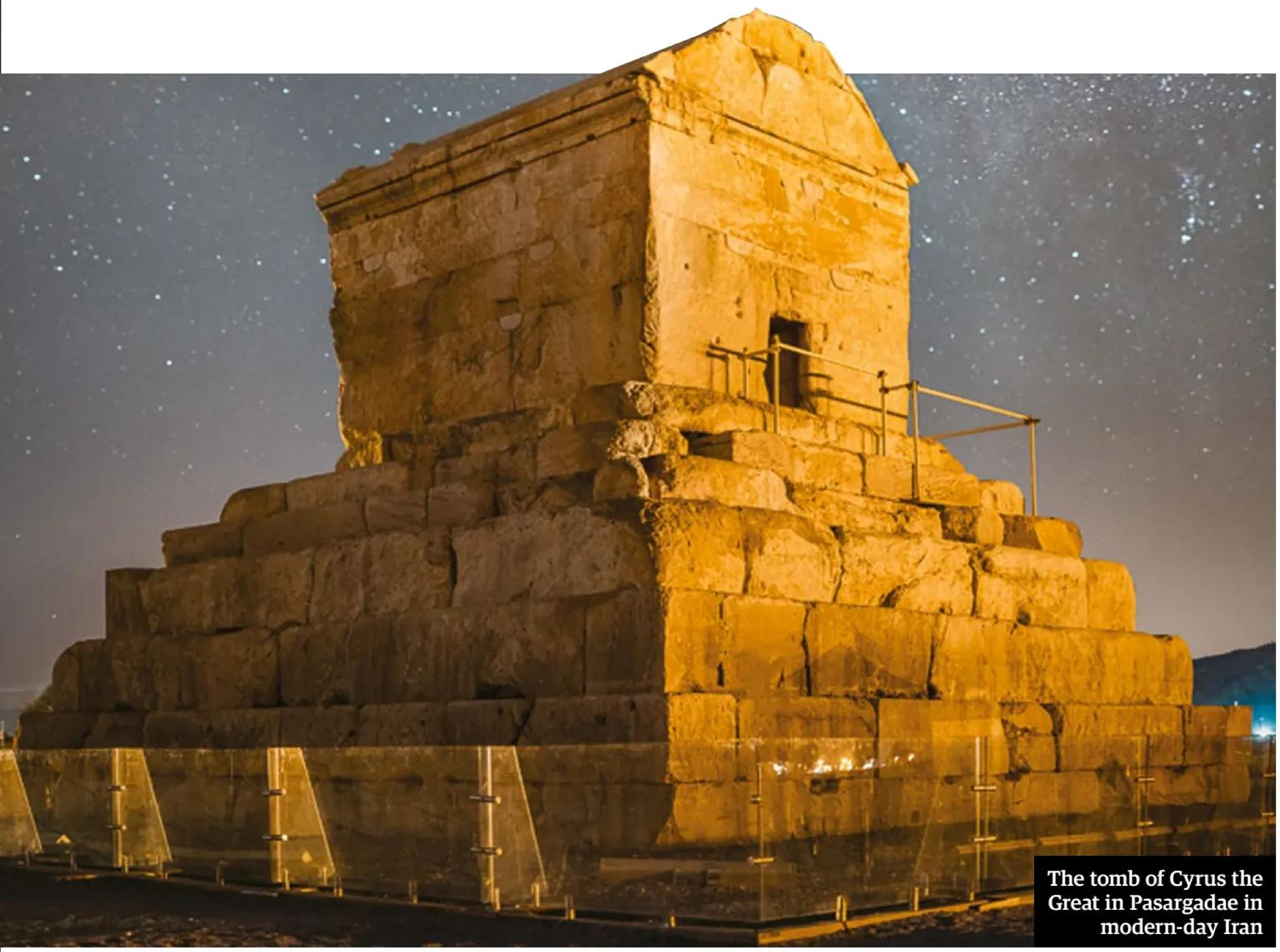
It's been called the first ever human rights charter, but what did it promise?

Only ten inches long, the Cyrus Cylinder is a major source for the king's achievements, though an unreliable one. For one thing, it's damaged, and the text is incomplete. For another, it is in effect propaganda justifying Cyrus' conquests and rule. The Babylonian king, Nabonidus, is denigrated and Cyrus is praised as the protector of Babylonian interests. The cuneiform text, here selected from the British Museum translation, reads in part:

"Rites inappropriate to [the cult-cities] were daily gabbled, and as an insult, he (Nabonidus) brought the daily offerings to a halt. In his mind, reverential fear of Marduk, king of the gods, came to an end. He did more evil to his city every day, and to his people. Enlil-of-the-gods became extremely angry at their complaints. The gods left their shrines, angry that he had made them enter into Babylon. Enlil-of-the-gods inspected and checked all the countries, seeking for the upright king of his choice. He took the hand of Cyrus, and called him by name, proclaiming him aloud for the kingship over all of everything. Marduk, the great lord, who nurtures his people, saw with pleasure his fine deeds and true heart, and ordered that he should go to Babylon. He had him enter without fighting or battle. He handed over to him Nabonidus, the king who did not fear him. All the people, nobles and governors bowed down before him and kissed his feet, rejoicing over his kingship, and their faces shone. I am Cyrus, king of the universe, the great king, the powerful king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four quarters of the world."



The Cyrus Cylinder was found broken into several fragments and is now housed at the British Museum



The tomb of Cyrus the Great in Pasargadae in modern-day Iran

out when the boy play-acted being a king so convincingly that he came to Astyages' attention. Astyages eventually recognised his grandson, who was, of course, Cyrus.

The boy spent his childhood with Astyages, being trained and educated. According to the Greek historian and diarist Xenophon, he was a boy of rare intelligence and charm: "[He] was something too much of a talker, in part, may be, because of his bringing-up. He had been trained by his master, whenever he sat in judgment, to give a reason for what he did, and to look for the like reason from others. And moreover, his curiosity and thirst for knowledge were such that he must needs inquire from every one he met the explanation of this, that, and the other… talkativeness had become, as it were, his second nature. But… the impression left on the listener was not of arrogance, but of simplicity and warmheartedness… However, as he grew in stature and the years led him to the time when childhood passes into youth he became more chary of his words… but his company was still most fascinating, and little wonder: for whenever it came to a trial of skill between himself and his comrades he would never challenge his mates to those feats in which he himself excelled: he would start precisely one where he felt his own inferiority… and then, when he was worsted, he would be the first to laugh at his own discomfiture."

Eventually, as a young man, Cyrus returned to his father's court in Persia, where he acceded to the throne in about 559 BCE. Herodotus picked up the story. To prevent his dream coming true, Astyages invaded Persia. But Cyrus defeated him, and in about 550 BCE, took Media. In revenge, Astyages summoned the son of the disobedient noble and had him chopped, roasted and boiled, and then tricked the noble into eating the boy.

Next in line was Lydia, which fell a few years later. No details are recorded, though Herodotus has a story to fill the gap. The Lydian king was Croesus, of legendary wealth. Croesus consulted the great oracle at Delphi and was told that if he attacked the Persians he would destroy "a great empire". He attacked, and Cyrus, strengthened by Median troops, drove Croesus back inside his capital, Sardis. Persian troops then scaled a supposedly unscaleable wall, and the city fell. The great empire that Croesus destroyed was his own.

In 540 BCE, Cyrus turned on his next target, Babylon. Famous as the capital of a great empire for more than 1,000 years, Babylon had fallen on hard times until its fortunes revived under Nebuchadnezzar in the early 500s BCE, during which he sacked Jerusalem and captured numerous Jews, an event vividly recorded in the Bible. By Cyrus' time, though, Babylon had become a soft target because its king, Nabonidus, had been absent for ten years, leaving the city in the hands of his son, Belshazzar. His unexplained absence – he was perhaps trying to extend trade routes in Arabia – seems to have made him unpopular. Or perhaps he was unpopular because on his return he had all the images of Babylonian gods brought from their sanctuaries into the capital for safekeeping. Whatever the reason, it gave Cyrus a chance to present himself as the man who would protect Babylonian religion.

In autumn 539 BCE – one of the few firm dates in the history of the time – Cyrus invaded Babylonia, won a battle at Opis, to the north of the capital, and then entered Babylon, seemingly without further resistance. According to Herodotus, the Persians did this by diverting the Euphrates, lowering the water level until they could march across the riverbed. Nabonidus was captured and he vanished from history, his fate unknown.

"Whatever the reason, it gave Cyrus a chance to present himself as the man who would protect Babylonian religion"

Cyrus recorded his conquest in the clay document known as the Cyrus Cylinder, a blatant piece of PR designed to justify his conquests. It claims that Nabonidus had been unstable and impious, and that the great god Enlil had chosen Cyrus as his instrument to bring peace by restoring the shrines, allowing refugees to return and rebuilding the capital. The cylinder declares: "I returned the images of the gods, who had resided there, to their places and I let them dwell in eternal abodes. I gathered all their inhabitants and returned to them their dwellings." As a result, "all nobles and governors bowed down before him [Cyrus] and kissed his feet, and their faces shone."

His generosity did not apply only to the local religions. The Jews, too, were allowed to return from their captivity to Israel. Possibly (as the Bible says), Cyrus actually funded the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. In fact, the rebuilding occurred under Cyrus' grandson, Darius, but Cyrus' role became accepted as a fact. The 1st-century Jewish historian Josephus claimed to quote a letter from Cyrus: "I have given leave to as many of the Jews that dwell in my country as please to return to their own country, and to rebuild their city, and to build the temple of God at Jerusalem on the same place where it was before." However, Josephus was writing 500 years later, and he presents no evidence for this.

In any event, the Jews developed huge admiration for Cyrus. The prophet Isaiah called Cyrus God's 'anointed' – in effect the Messiah – and prophesied God-given victories over all nations. Another prophet, Ezra, has Cyrus saying that God "hath given me all the kingdoms of the Earth".

After Babylon, where now? To the north and east lay another world to conquer: the land of the nomadic horsemen, the Scythians. Having appointed governors and officials to rule the different provinces and peoples of his empire, Cyrus probably died fighting the Scythians in 530 BCE. Again, we have no firm records, just stories, the best of which is told by Herodotus.

One of the Scythian tribes was called Massagetae, known for drinking fermented mares' milk and for the outlandish equality of the sexes. Armoured in helmets and war belts, they fought on horseback with battle axes and bows, men and women alike. At the time, they were ruled by a queen named Tomyris.

Nomadic horse-archers were almost impossible to defeat because they vanished like mist across the steppe. So (in Herodotus' tale) Cyrus resorted to trickery. He set out a banquet with much wine, which was unfamiliar to the milk-drinking nomads. The Persians withdrew, the nomads advanced, found the banquet, ate, drank and fell into a stupor. The Persians returned, killed most of them and took Tomyris' son prisoner. When he awoke, he committed suicide. Tomyris swore to get her revenge: "Leave my land now… or I will give you more blood than you can drink." In the next battle, the nomads destroyed the Persians and killed Cyrus. Tomyris found the king's corpse, filled a skin container with blood, cut off his head and thrust it into the blood with these words: "Although I am alive and gained victory over you in battle, you have destroyed me because you took my son by trickery. Now I shall do just as I threatened, and give you your fill of blood."

It is a vivid tale, but its truth for Herodotus was probably less in the details than the moral: great leaders should not resort to trickery.

Cyrus had ruled for some 30 years and created an empire more than 2,500 kilometres across, the largest in the world to date, reaching from the Black Sea to present-day Afghanistan. His son Cambyses and another descendant, Darius, extended the empire into Egypt, the Libyan and India. It was not to last. In the 330s BCE, Alexander the Great defeated the Persians, and the Achaemenids came to an ignominious end.

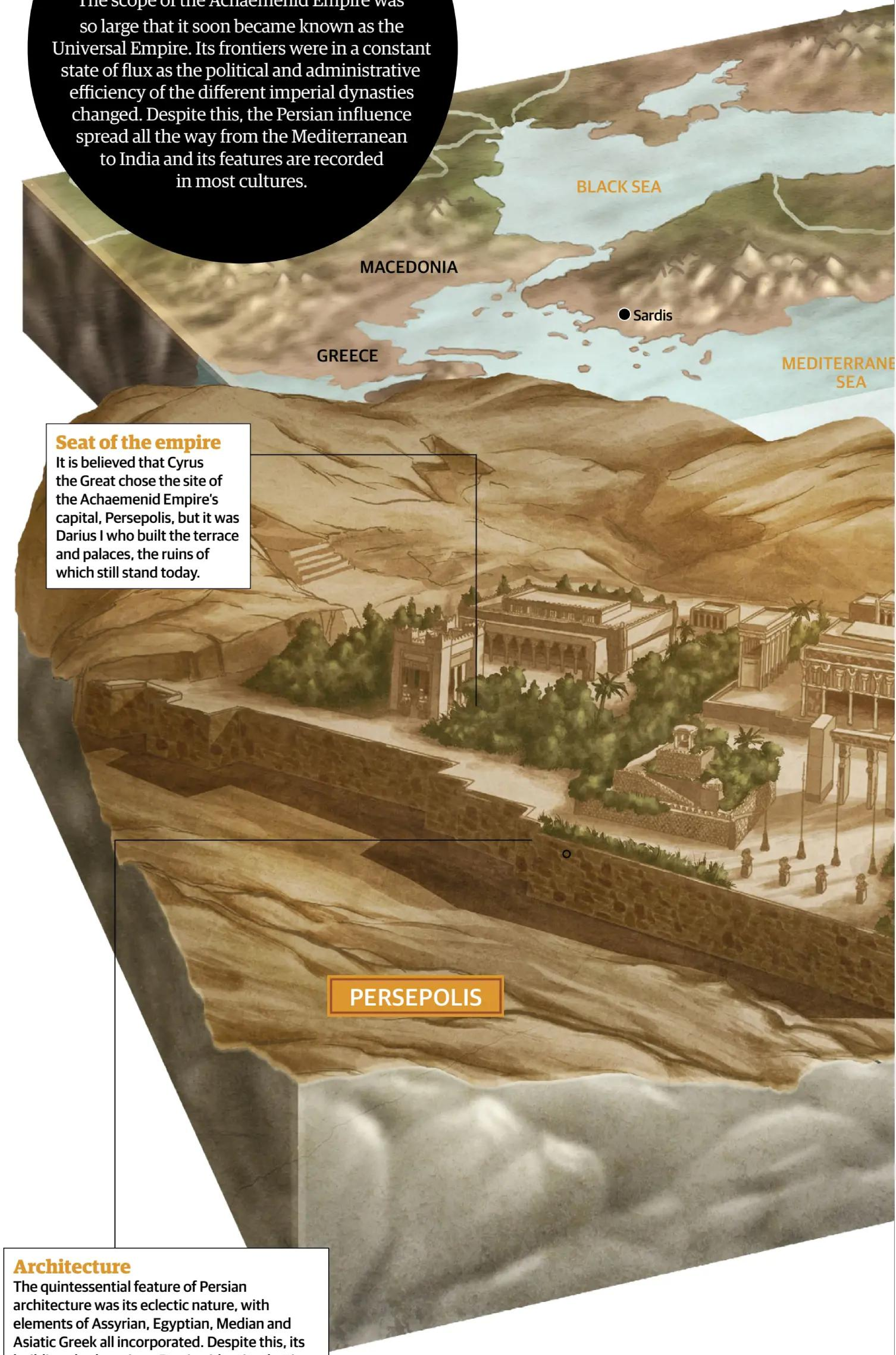
However, Cyrus' creation sent echoes down the corridors of time. Scholars agree that his success as an imperial ruler owed much to his form of government, balancing central administration with local freedom. His system was retained by subsequent dynasties, and served for more than 1,000 years until the Arab conquest of Persia in the seventh century.

The Cyrus Cylinder even proclaims such a modern-sounding commitment to religious freedom and justice that, in the 1970s, the Shah of Iran called it "the first human rights charter in history". More likely, according to others, it resembles modernity in a different form, as a puffed-up piece of propaganda. But Iran still sees it as a foundation stone of national identity.

The memory of Cyrus lives on at his supposed burial site near Shiraz, in southern Iran. The tomb, standing on a rock plinth, is close to the ruins of Pasargadae, Cyrus' capital until his son Cambyses changed it to Susa. There is no hard evidence that it is his tomb, but if it is – and the same as the one honoured two centuries after his burial by Alexander – it bore a long-gone inscription, which ran in one version: "Passer-by, I am Cyrus, who gave the Persians an empire, and was king of Asia. Grudge me not therefore this monument."

SIZE MATTERS

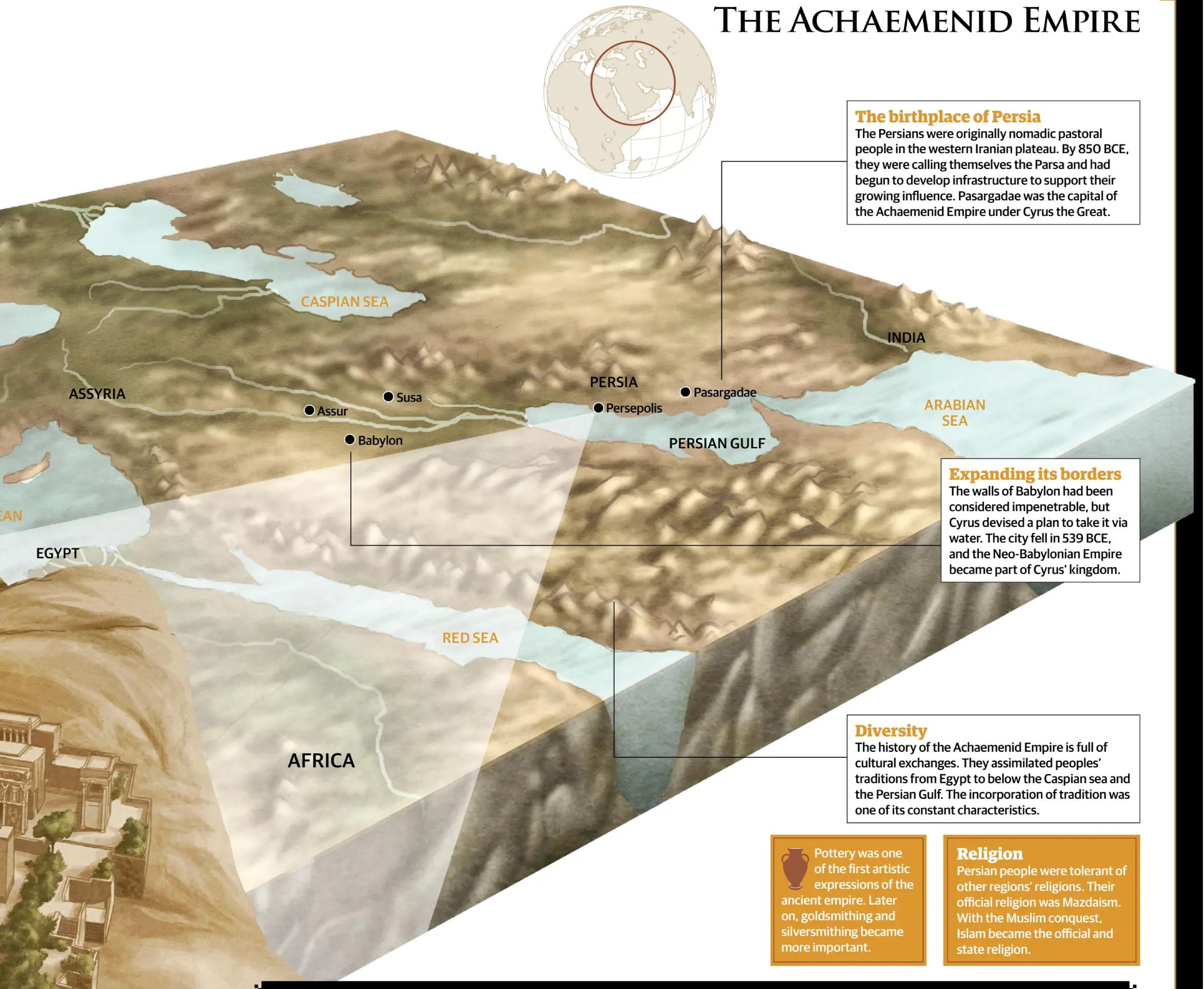
The scope of the Achaemenid Empire was so large that it soon became known as the Universal Empire. Its frontiers were in a constant state of flux as the political and administrative efficiency of the different imperial dynasties changed. Despite this, the Persian influence spread all the way from the Mediterranean to India and its features are recorded in most cultures.



Seat of the empire
It is believed that Cyrus the Great chose the site of the Achaemenid Empire's capital, Persepolis, but it was Darius I who built the terrace and palaces, the ruins of which still stand today.

Architecture
The quintessential feature of Persian architecture was its eclectic nature, with elements of Assyrian, Egyptian, Median and Asiatic Greek all incorporated. Despite this, its buildings had a unique Persian identity that is recognisable the world over.

THE ACHAEMENID EMPIRE



The birthplace of Persia
The Persians were originally nomadic pastoral people in the western Iranian plateau. By 850 BCE, they were calling themselves the Parsa and had begun to develop infrastructure to support their growing influence. Pasargadae was the capital of the Achaemenid Empire under Cyrus the Great.

Expanding its borders
The walls of Babylon had been considered impenetrable, but Cyrus devised a plan to take it via water. The city fell in 539 BCE, and the Neo-Babylonian Empire became part of Cyrus' kingdom.

Diversity
The history of the Achaemenid Empire is full of cultural exchanges. They assimilated peoples' traditions from Egypt to below the Caspian sea and the Persian Gulf. The incorporation of tradition was one of its constant characteristics.

Pottery was one of the first artistic expressions of the ancient empire. Later on, goldsmithing and silversmithing became more important.

Religion
Persian people were tolerant of other regions' religions. Their official religion was Mazdaism. With the Muslim conquest, Islam became the official and state religion.

THE PERSIAN IMMORTALS

Of all the terrors that the Persian army brought, the most feared were the 'Immortals', an elite bunch of fighters who were nicknamed thus due to their apparent inability to die in combat. When one of its 10,000 infantry fell, they were immediately replaced, maintaining the corps as a cohesive entity with a constant strength.

The Immortals were armed with a short spear that was tipped with silver or gold counterbalances to differentiate their rank. The shortness of the spear gave mobility at the cost of reach. They also carried a short bow and arrow quiver. This granted them a flexibility to alter their combat range quickly, switching deftly from hand-to-hand to ranged combat in the blink of an eye.

The Immortals played an important role in Cambyses II's conquest of Egypt in 525 BCE and Darius I's invasion of India's smaller western frontier kingdoms (western Punjab and Sindh, now in Pakistan) and Scythia in 520 BCE and 513 BCE. Immortals participated in the Battle of Thermopylae of 480 BCE against the Spartans and were among the Persian occupation troops in Greece in 479 BCE under Mardonius.

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THE MACEDONIAN EMPIRE

At the head of the world's most feared fighting force, Alexander the Great took for himself a vast empire through the sword, and has been called a hero, tyrant and a god

Written by James Hoare

The king died quickly, his white robes soaked red. The laughter and rejoicing of a royal marriage - the wedding of his daughter - had quickly turned to screams and wails of lament as Pausanias, a member of the king's personal guard, turned on his master, driving a dagger between his ribs. Tripping on a vine as he fled the scene for his getaway horse, the assassin was brutally stabbed to death by the furious spears of pursuing guards. Philip II died as he had lived: awash with blood and surrounded by intrigue. His legacy would leave bloody footprints across the whole of Central Asia and the Middle East.

Over a 23-year reign from 359 to 336 BCE, the king of Macedon - a mountainous land overlapping modern northern Greece, Albania, Bulgaria and Macedonia - had gone from ruler of a barbarous backwater of tribal highlanders to the overlord of the fractious Greek kingdoms and city-states. Bringing his rival monarchs in line through war, military alliance and marriage, Philip II had reformed the Macedonian army into one of the most feared fighting forces in the ancient world, with a view to bloodying their most hated foes, the Achaemenid Empire of Persia, which had humbled and humiliated the Greeks in the Greco-Persian Wars a century earlier. Aged just 20, Alexander III of Macedon - soon to be remembered as Alexander the Great - took the throne as the head of a military machine on the brink of war and legendary status, and gleefully drove it full throttle over the edge.

Alexander had been groomed for greatness from birth, but he was no pampered prince. Tutored by the austere Leonidas, who forbade all luxury, the general Lysimachus and the philosopher Aristotle, Alexander was proficient with weapons, horse riding and playing the lyre, and an expert in ethics, philosophy and the skills of debate. He trained daily in pankration, an Ancient Greek martial art that focused on savage grapples, punches, kicks and choke holds. A Renaissance man before the Renaissance, he was schooled in the skills to conquer and the knowledge to rule. At 16 he had governed Macedon as regent while his father warred far from home, the young heir putting down rebellious tribes in Thrace and founding a whole new city, Alexandropolis - the first of many that would bear his name.

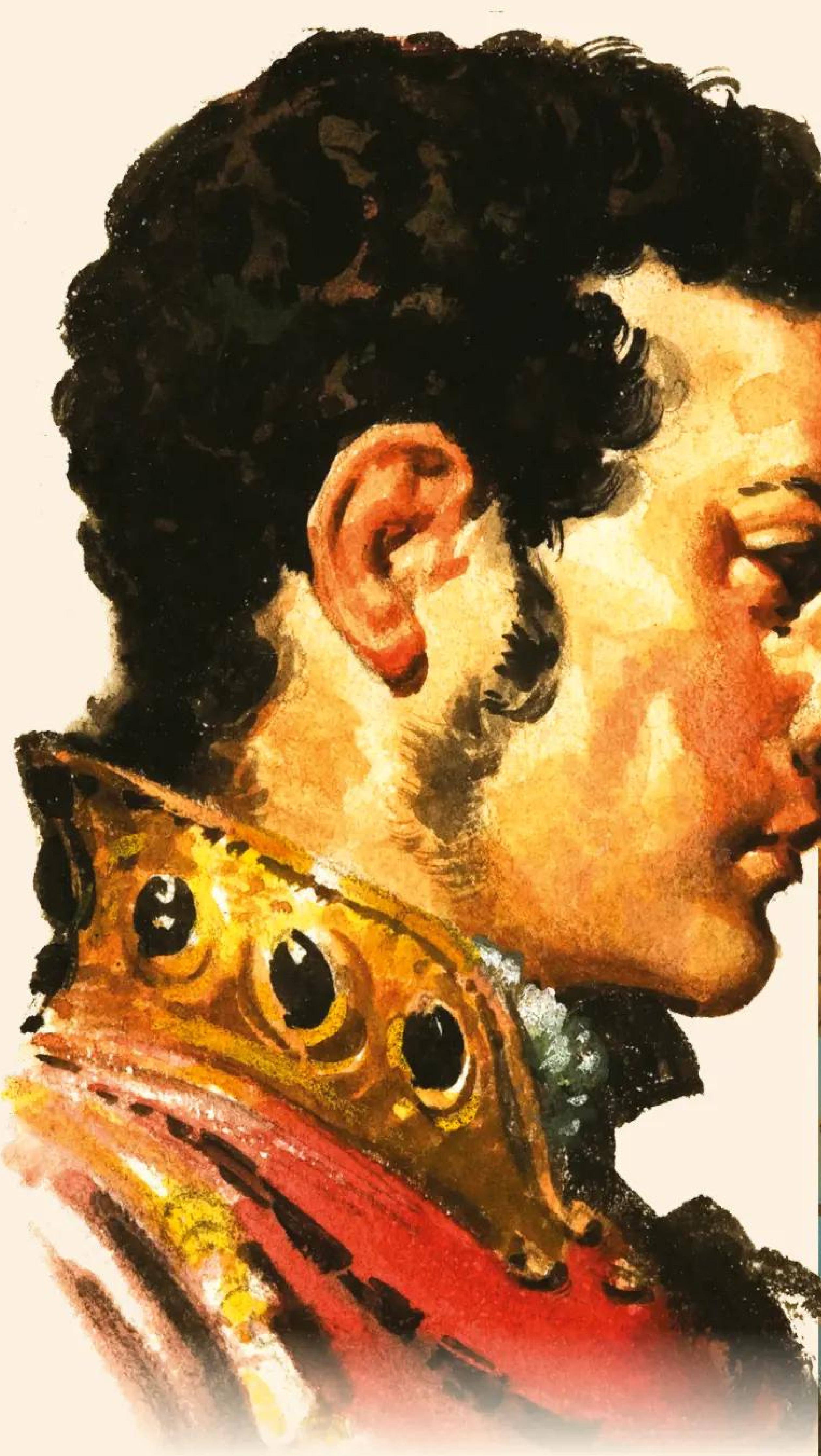
Like so many civilisations before and after them, the Ancient Greeks loved to gossip. Philip's death, they said, was an act of revenge from his scorned lover Pausanias, but two other people immediately benefited: Olympias, mother of Alexander and once-favoured wife of Philip, had been in danger of losing her status to a younger

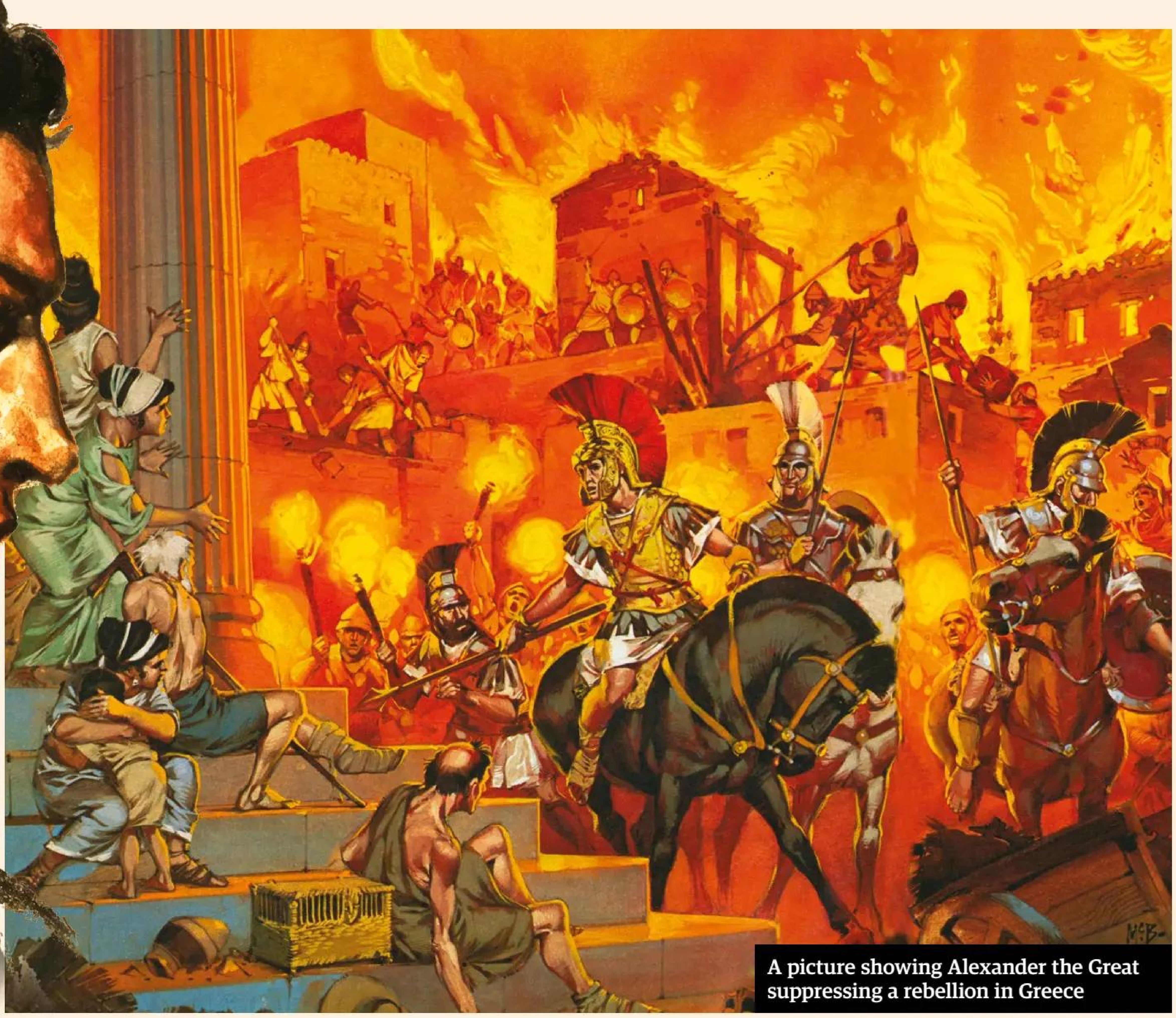
ALEXANDER THE GREAT

Greek, 356-323 BCE

Brief Bio

Becoming king of Macedon after his father's murder, Alexander led the Greeks into war against the powerful Persian Empire. With charisma and cunning, he led from the frontline to create an empire that stretched from Libya to India, creating a new golden age for Hellenic culture.





A picture showing Alexander the Great suppressing a rebellion in Greece

bride; and Alexander himself, who promptly executed all other contenders for the crown and crushed rebellions across Greece. Olympias, too, set about consolidating her power, having Cleopatra Eurydice, her replacement as consort to the dead king, and her baby daughter burned alive.

"He steered destiny himself, consciously building a legend that would fit his accomplishments"

The dubious heroes of myth were Alexander's own blueprint for greatness. With legendary figures on both sides of the family tree, it was hard not to be convinced of his own special destiny. His father's bloodline claimed descent from Heracles – the son of Zeus and bull-wrestling demigod of Twelve Labours fame – while his mother's family looked up to Achilles, the all-but-invulnerable champion of the fabled Siege of Troy. Omens and portents prefigured every decision, but as much as this ambitious new king gave every appearance of being a slave to destiny – looking for meaning in flights of birds and consulting oracles at every turn – he steered destiny himself, consciously building a legend that would lift his accomplishments well beyond those of his father and into the same world of the legendary journeys and heroic battles that had once inspired him. In just shy of a decade, he crushed the life out of the once-mighty Persian state and expanded the borders of his domain from Libya to India to create a mighty empire.

Fittingly, this conquest began with some mythical brand management. Picking up where Philip II's army of invasion had been poised, Alexander crossed the Dardanelles – the narrow channel connecting the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, and Europe from Asia Minor – in early 334 BCE with 47,000 soldiers and mercenaries from across Macedon and the Greek kingdoms. Leaping from his warship in full ceremonial armour, vast plumed helmet and golden breastplate, the emperor-to-be sent a spear whistling through the air to crash into the undefended soil of Asia Minor. It was the first blow in a war that would claim for Alexander over 200,000 square miles of land and leave between 75,000 and 200,000 dead.

The coastline of what is now Turkey was littered with Greek cities ruled by the Persian invaders, and of them Troy had particular significance for Alexander. The alleged site of his maternal ancestor Achilles' most celebrated victory and tragic death, Alexander carried with him on his journey the story of the Trojan War, Homer's epic *Iliad* (a gift from his tutor Aristotle), and quoted from it often. First, he had the tomb of Achilles opened so he could pay tribute, then riding to a nearby temple of Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, the Macedon king was shown what they claimed were the weapons of Achilles. There, he took down a shield, replacing it with his own. Alexander wasn't merely content sharing a fanciful familial association with Achilles; he wanted to rival him, visiting this site of bloodshed and heroism, and taking the mantle of one of Ancient Greece's greatest heroes.

Was it a propaganda stunt that spurred on his army, or did he believe it? His fierce pragmatism and ambition would suggest both – a dangerous and unpredictable combination that made him one of the battlefield's most iconic generals.

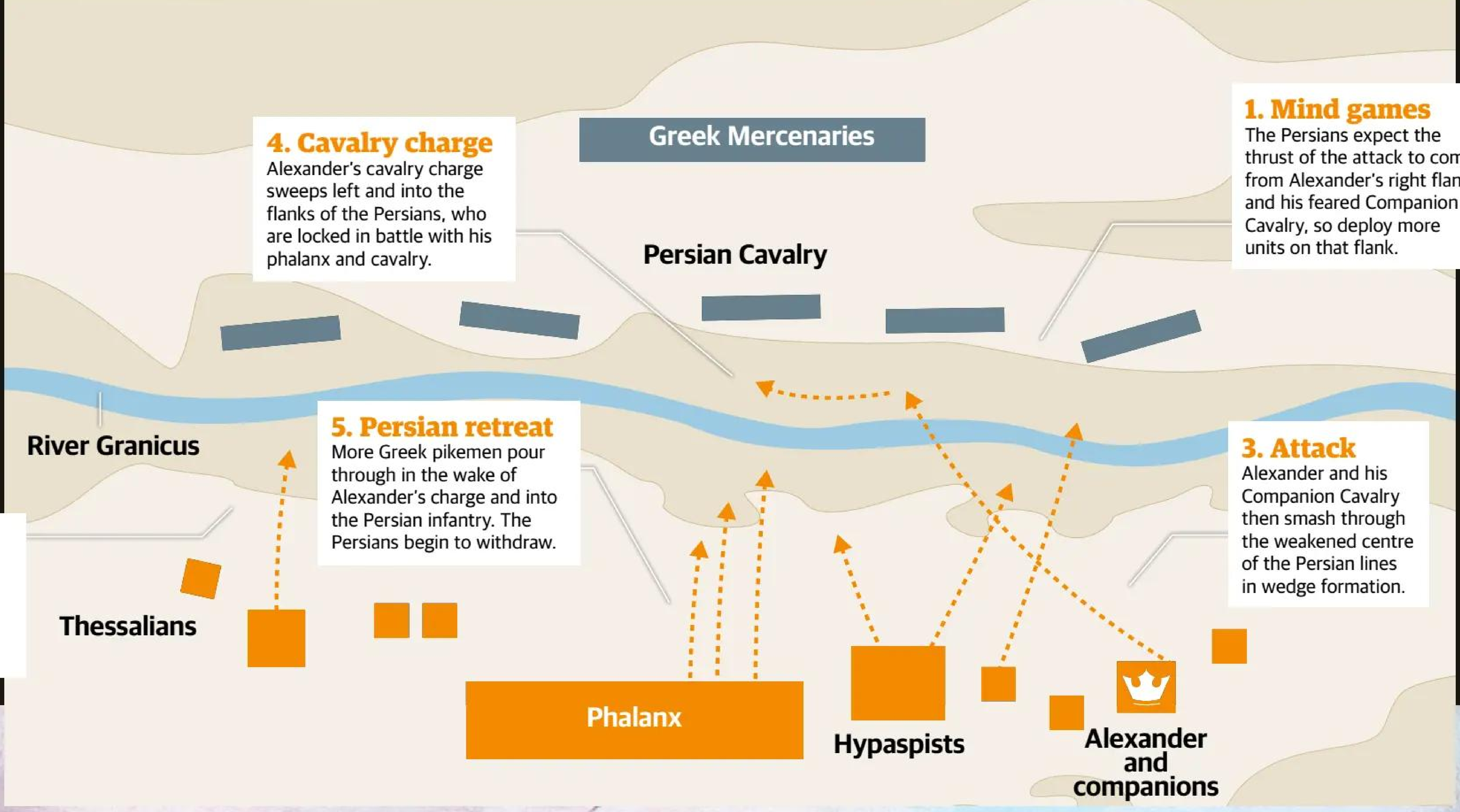
First meeting the Persians in battle in 334 BCE, Alexander quickly established a formula for swift and decisive victory at the Battle of the Granicus, just outside of his beloved Troy. Leading from the front ranks, a feint drew the stronger Persian units and their battle-hardened Greek mercenaries out, spreading their line thin and allowing Alexander's cavalry to hammer through their scattered ranks. He was welcomed as a liberator by the Greek subjects of Asia Minor, and endeavoured to win over the local population too. Claiming to distrust tyrants, he appointed local rulers and allowed them relative independence, but with a new centralised tax system he ensured their autonomy was reliant upon his handouts.

With Persia's control of the vast expanse of Asia Minor resting on its superior navy, Alexander opted to scatter his own vessels rather than fight a sea war he couldn't win, and marched down the coast to take the enemy's largest naval port, Halicarnassus – now Bodrum in Turkey – by land, forcing his way through the walls until the Persians

BATTLE OF THE GRANICUS (334 BCE)

Alexander's first victory against the Persian Empire

The first real clash between Persian troops and Alexander's newly minted invasion force remains the best example of his signature battle tactic. Using heavy cavalry to prise apart the weakest part of the enemy line while his finely drilled infantry kept the bulk of the enemy tangled up on their spears, it relied upon the professionalism of Macedon's army, as well as the unique talents of its core units. It showed that Alexander knew how best to use the forces that his father had amassed.



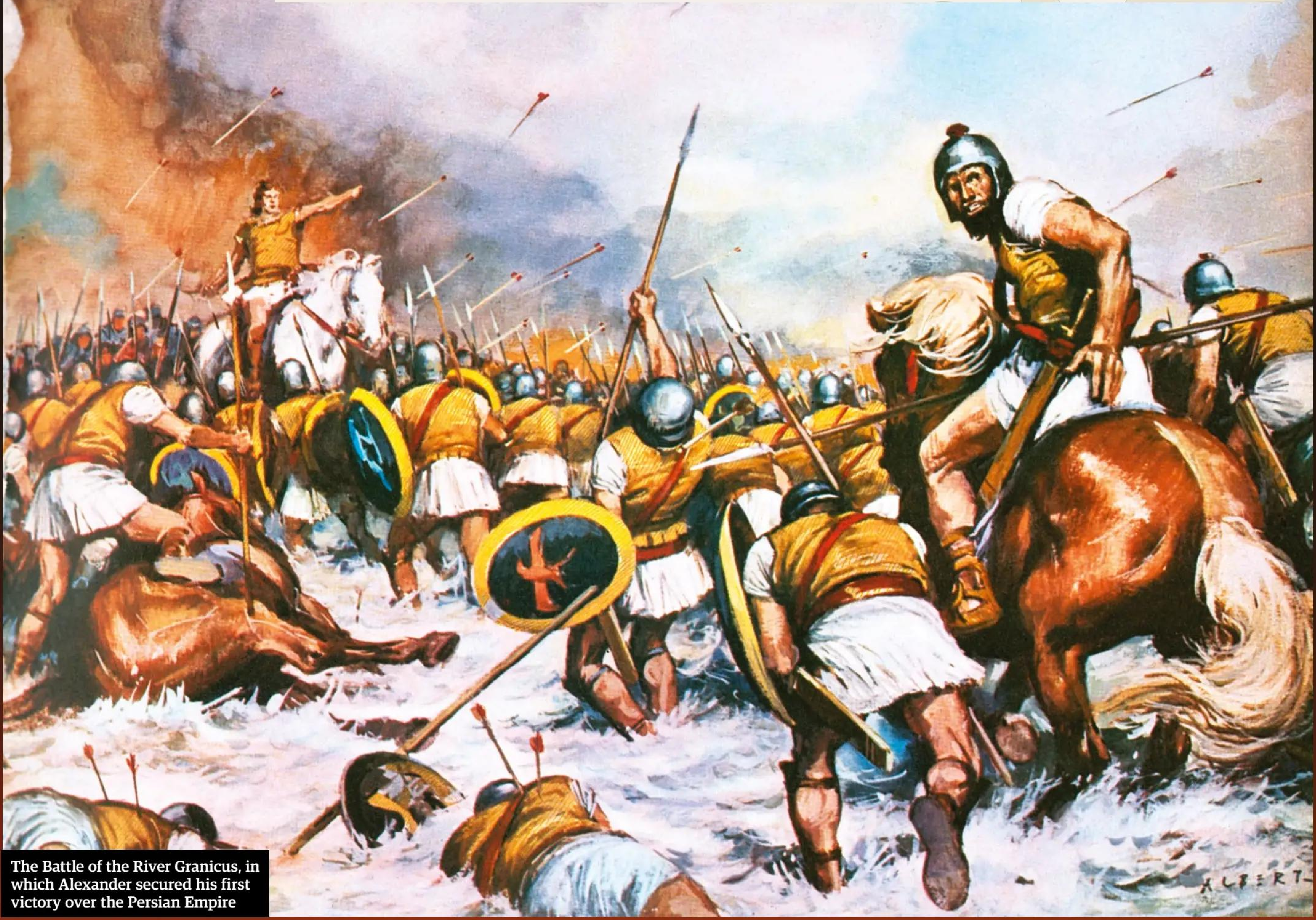
1. Mind games
The Persians expect the thrust of the attack to come from Alexander's right flank and his feared Companion Cavalry, so deploy more units on that flank.

2. Feint
Alexander's Thessalian cavalry and pikemen feint from the left. The Persians reinforce the line from the centre to drive them back.

3. Attack
Alexander and his Companion Cavalry then smash through the weakened centre of the Persian lines in wedge formation.

4. Cavalry charge
Alexander's cavalry charge sweeps left and into the flanks of the Persians, who are locked in battle with his phalanx and cavalry.

5. Persian retreat
More Greek pikemen pour through in the wake of Alexander's charge and into the Persian infantry. The Persians begin to withdraw.



The Battle of the River Granicus, in which Alexander secured his first victory over the Persian Empire

> “Alexander rode up and down his ranks of assembled men to deliver an address worthy of heroes”

had to abandon their own city. After passing through Cappadocia with scarcely any resistance thanks to incompetent local governors in 333 BCE, Darius III, the Persian Shahanshah – king of kings – could stomach this embarrassment no longer, and with an army that outnumbered the Greeks by two to one, confronted Alexander at the Battle of Issus. Were the king to fail here then Darius’ army would be able to link up with his powerful navy and Alexander’s whole campaign, resting as it did on his thin line of victories down the coast, would be wiped out and all dreams of Greek civilisation free from the menaces of its aggressive eastern neighbour would spill out into the dust like so much wasted Macedonian blood. At Issus, like many battles before and after, Alexander rode up and down his ranks of assembled men to deliver an address worthy of heroes, playing on old glories and grudges.

“He excited the Illyrians and Thracians by describing the enemy’s wealth and treasures, and the Greeks by putting them in mind of their wars of old, and their deadly hatred towards the Persians,” wrote the historian Justin in the 3rd century CE. “He reminded the Macedonians at one time of their conquests in Europe, and at another of their desire to subdue Asia, boasting that no troops in the world had been found a match for them, and assuring them that this battle would put an end to their labours and crown their glory.”

With shock etched upon his face, Darius fled the battlefield as the Greek charge cut through his ranks like a scythe, with Alexander at its head, crashing straight through the Persian flanks and then into their rearguard. With their king gone they began a chaotic and humiliating retreat. With only one Persian port left – Tyre, in what is now Lebanon – and the hill fort of Gaza in modern Palestine both falling in 332 BCE, the thinly stretched Achaemenid defences west of Babylon quickly crumbled or withdrew before the relentless march of Alexander.

Unexpectedly, he then turned his attention not east towards the enemy’s exposed heart, but west in the direction of Egypt and Libya. They, like the Greek colonies of Asia Minor, would welcome him as a saviour. With no standing army and whole swathes of the country in the hands of Egyptian rebels, the Persian governor handed over control of the province outright. The last set of invaders had disrespected their gods, so perhaps the Egyptians were keen to take advantage of Alexander’s vanity and safeguard their faith by placing this new warlord right at the heart of it. Maybe, too, Alexander had seen how illusionary Persian authority was in Egypt, and wanted to try a different tack. He may have been one of the world’s greatest generals, but he knew the sword was not the only path to acquiring new territory.

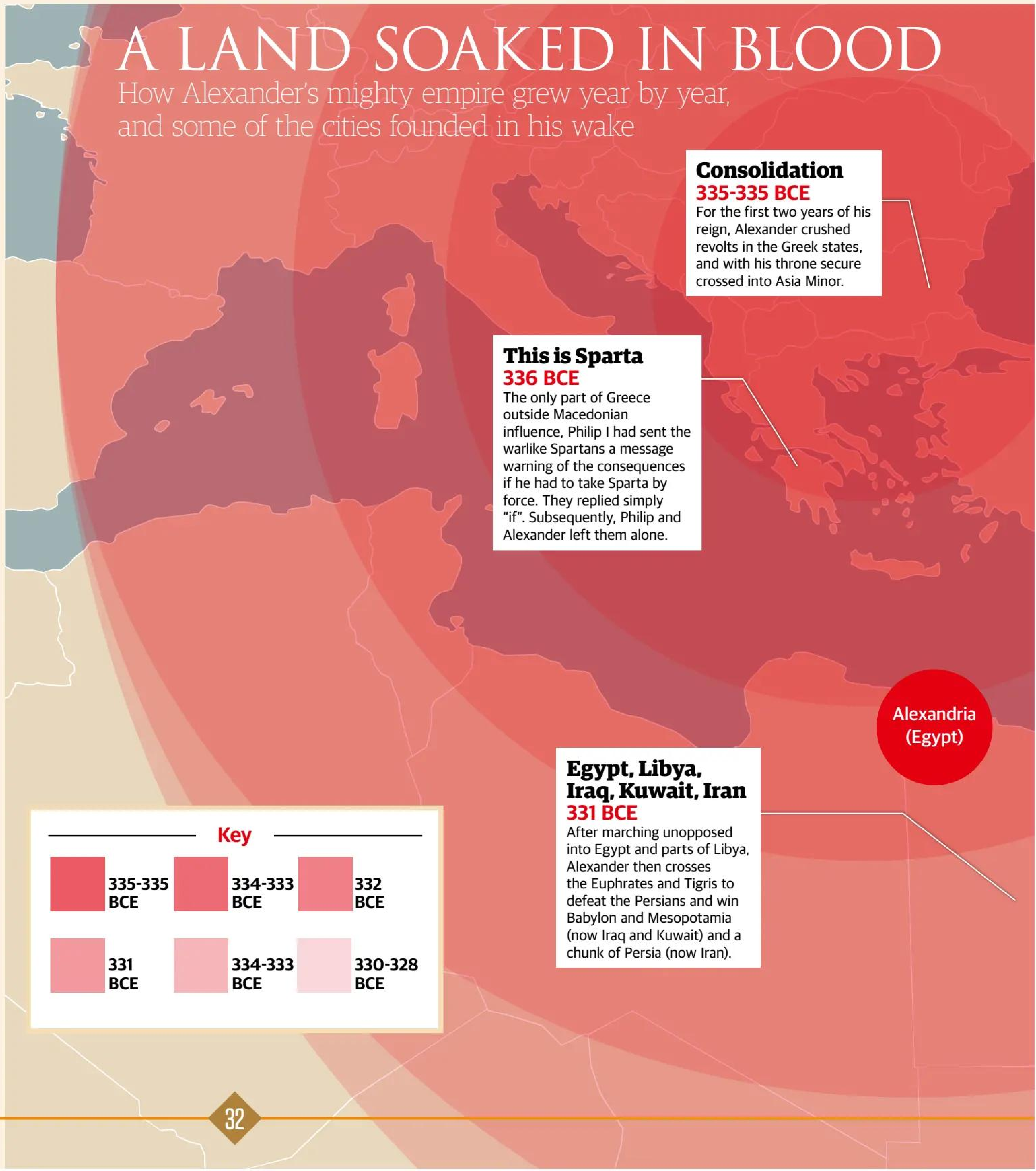
Riding out to the famous Oracle of Amun – the Egyptian answer to Zeus – at the Siwa oasis, Alexander was welcomed into the inner sanctum of this ancient temple, an honour usually afforded only to the ordained priests of Amun, while his entourage was forced to wait in the courtyard. The exact details of Alexander’s exchange with the Oracle remain a mystery, but the end result was unambiguous. Alexander was now more than merely a hero of legend. Even the myth of Achilles reborn could scarcely contain his ambition, and he declared himself the son of Zeus. His worship spread across Egypt, where he was raised to the rank of pharaoh. This didn’t sit well with Alexander’s countrymen, but here at least, the king didn’t push it.

“[Alexander] bore himself haughtily towards the barbarians,” recalled the army’s official historian Plutarch, “and like one fully persuaded of his divine birth and parentage, but with the Greeks it was within limits and somewhat rarely that he assumed his own divinity.” Despite his ‘haughtiness’, Alexander had been raised on tales of the Egyptian gods from his mother, and Greeks – the philosopher Plato among them – had long journeyed to this ancient land to study in what they regarded as the birthplace of civilisation. Standing amid the great pyramids and temples, the 25-year-old Alexander either saw around him an ancient power to be held in great respect or feats of long-dead god-kings that he had to better.

The result was the city of Alexandria, planned in detail by the king, from wide boulevards and great temples to defences and plumbing. Construction began in 331 BCE, and it remains the second-largest city and largest seaport in Egypt, linking the king’s new world to his old one, both by trade across the Mediterranean and by culture. In making Alexandria the crossroads between two great civilisations, a great centre of learning where Greek and Egyptian religion, medicine, art, mathematics and philosophy could be bound together was created, and the city came to symbolise the

A LAND SOAKED IN BLOOD

How Alexander’s mighty empire grew year by year, and some of the cities founded in his wake



Consolidation
335-335 BCE
For the first two years of his reign, Alexander crushed revolts in the Greek states, and with his throne secure crossed into Asia Minor.

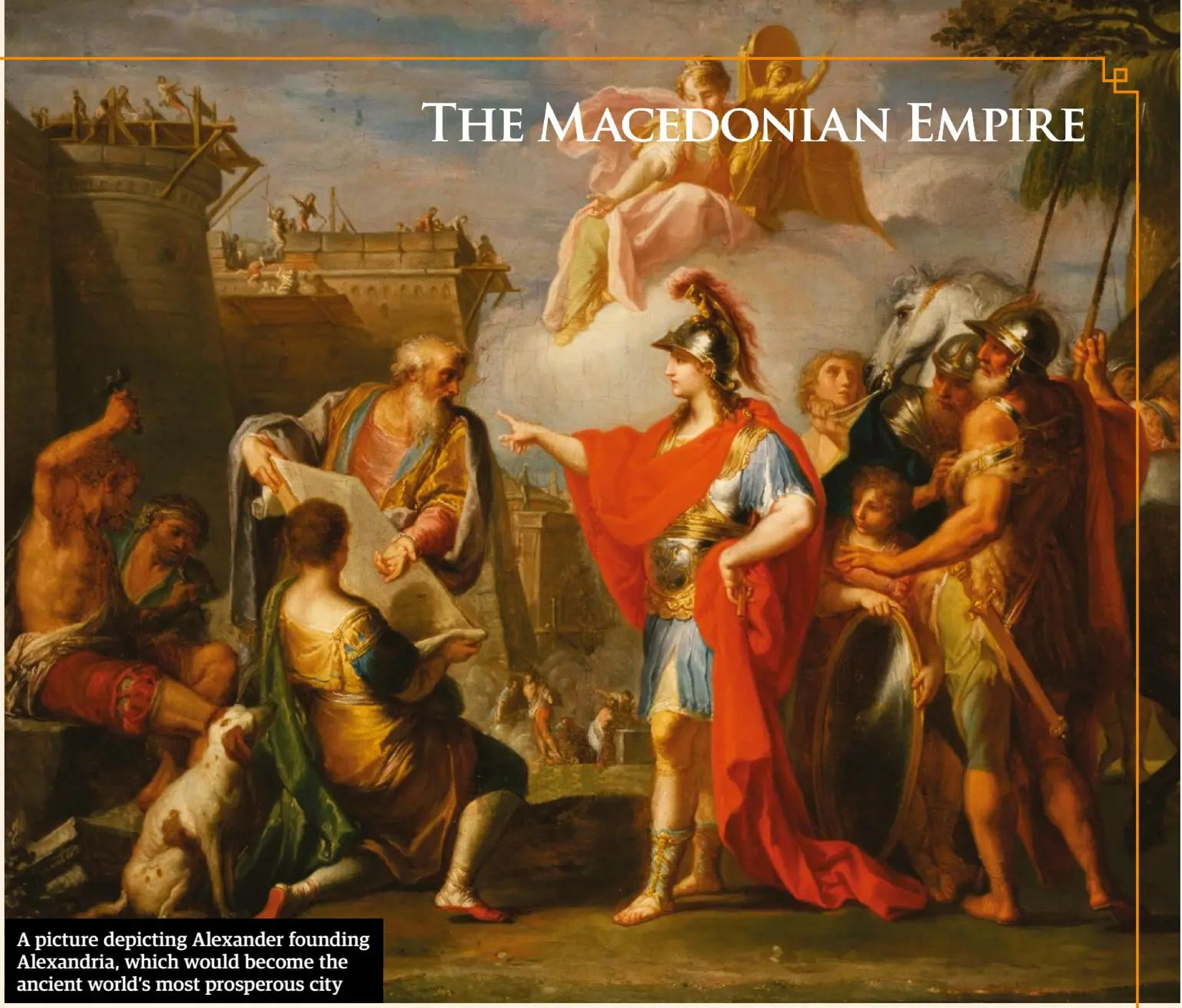
This is Sparta
336 BCE
The only part of Greece outside Macedonian influence, Philip I had sent the warlike Spartans a message warning of the consequences if he had to take Sparta by force. They replied simply “if”. Subsequently, Philip and Alexander left them alone.

Egypt, Libya, Iraq, Kuwait, Iran
331 BCE
After marching unopposed into Egypt and parts of Libya, Alexander then crosses the Euphrates and Tigris to defeat the Persians and win Babylon and Mesopotamia (now Iraq and Kuwait) and a chunk of Persia (now Iran).

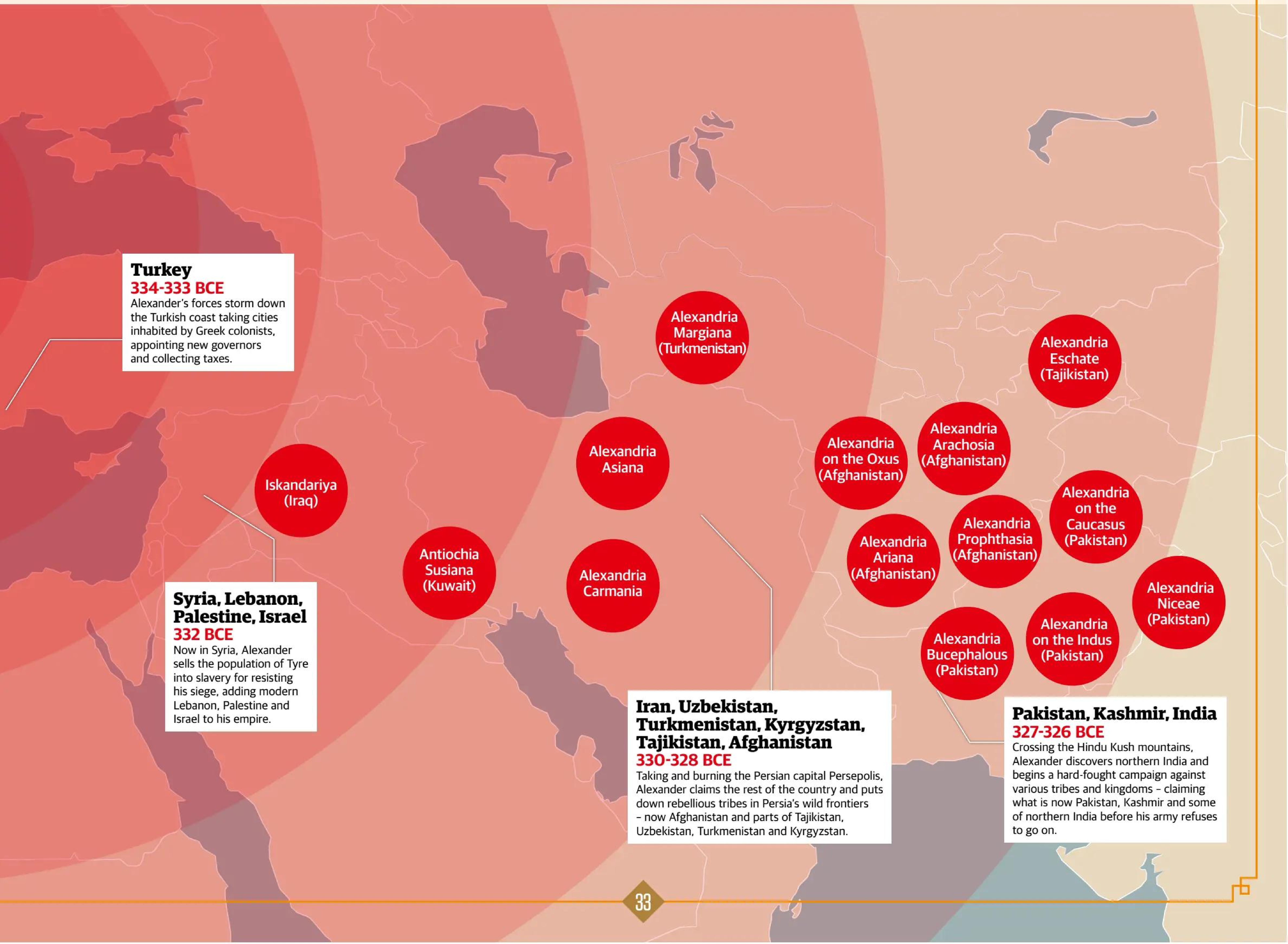
better aspects of Alexander's nature, his desire for education and learning and his patronage. Darker days, though, lay ahead.

Like an angel of death, Alexander turned from his 'liberation' of the Achaemenid Empire's downtrodden subjects and drove east with a vengeance. Now in the belly of the beast, Alexander's less heroic qualities were beginning to show themselves with greater regularity - an arrogance, cruelty and obsessive drive that had he failed in his conquest, would have been remembered as the madness of a tyrant rather than the drive of a king.

Breaking out of a pincer movement to defeat Darius again at the Battle of Gaugamela in 331 BCE, Alexander seized Babylonia. Provincial rulers loyal to the humiliated king of kings promptly surrendered. With his authority crumbling, Darius was stabbed by one of his generals, Bessus, and left by the roadside, where pursuing Greek scouts found him in 330 BCE. Overcome with pity - and perhaps respect for this foe they had chased across mountains and deserts - they offered the dying king of kings water from a nearby spring. In declaring himself Shahanshah, Bessus' throne was



A picture depicting Alexander founding Alexandria, which would become the ancient world's most prosperous city


Alexandria
Margiana
(Turkmenistan)
Alexandria
Eschate
(Tajikistan)
Iskandariya
(Iraq)
Alexandria
Asiana
Alexandria
on the Oxus
(Afghanistan)
Alexandria
Arachosia
(Afghanistan)
Alexandria
on the
Caucasus
(Pakistan)
Antiochia
Susiana
(Kuwait)
Alexandria
Carmania
Alexandria
Ariana
(Afghanistan)
Alexandria
Prophthasia
(Afghanistan)
Alexandria
Niceae
(Pakistan)
Alexandria
Bucephalous
(Pakistan)
Alexandria
on the Indus
(Pakistan)

Turkey
334-333 BCE
Alexander's forces storm down the Turkish coast taking cities inhabited by Greek colonists, appointing new governors and collecting taxes.

Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel
332 BCE
Now in Syria, Alexander sells the population of Tyre into slavery for resisting his siege, adding modern Lebanon, Palestine and Israel to his empire.

Iran, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan
330-328 BCE
Taking and burning the Persian capital Persepolis, Alexander claims the rest of the country and puts down rebellious tribes in Persia's wild frontiers - now Afghanistan and parts of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Pakistan, Kashmir, India
327-326 BCE
Crossing the Hindu Kush mountains, Alexander discovers northern India and begins a hard-fought campaign against various tribes and kingdoms - claiming what is now Pakistan, Kashmir and some of northern India before his army refuses to go on.

ALEXANDER'S ARMY

How the Ancient Greeks fought and conquered

1. Companion cavalry

Strengths

Well trained; wedge formation made turning easier; heavy bronze armour.

Weaknesses

Vulnerable to tightly packed infantry.

How did Alexander deploy them?

Led by Alexander personally, the Companion Cavalry were the unstoppable knights of Macedonia. Usually stationed on the right flank, they would punch through the enemy lines with their xyston lances and then wheel round to charge the rear.

2. Thessalian Cavalry

Strengths

Well trained; diamond formation for manoeuvrability; variety of weapons.

Weaknesses

Lighter armour than most heavy cavalry.

How did Alexander deploy them?

Similar to the Companion Cavalry, the Thessalian Cavalry's lighter armour and shorter spears and javelins made them an effective defensive unit. Stationed on the left flank, they could go where they were needed to see off any attackers.

3. Hoplites

Hoplites were the basic foot soldier of the Greek states.

Strengths

Versatile and adaptable.

Weaknesses

Low training; light armour.

How did Alexander deploy them?

Hoplites were the citizen men-at-arms of the other Greek states and one of the army's main cornerstones. Versatile but not necessarily as well-trained or heavily armoured as other units, Hoplites were placed behind the phalanx to prevent the army being encircled.

4. Phalanx

Strengths

The phalanx formation is devastating against cavalry; well trained; fast moving.

Weaknesses

Vulnerable in the flanks and rear; lightly equipped.

How did Alexander deploy them?

Created by Alexander's father the well-drilled and fast-moving pikemen fought in the dreaded Macedonian phalanx with their 18-foot sarissa lance. Deployed in the centre of the battle line, the phalanx could rush forward to tie down enemy cavalry or infantry.

5. Hypaspists

The Hypaspists were Alexander's close-quarter shock troops.

Strengths

Versatile close combat specialists; well-trained veterans.

Weaknesses

Vulnerable to cavalry and massed infantry.

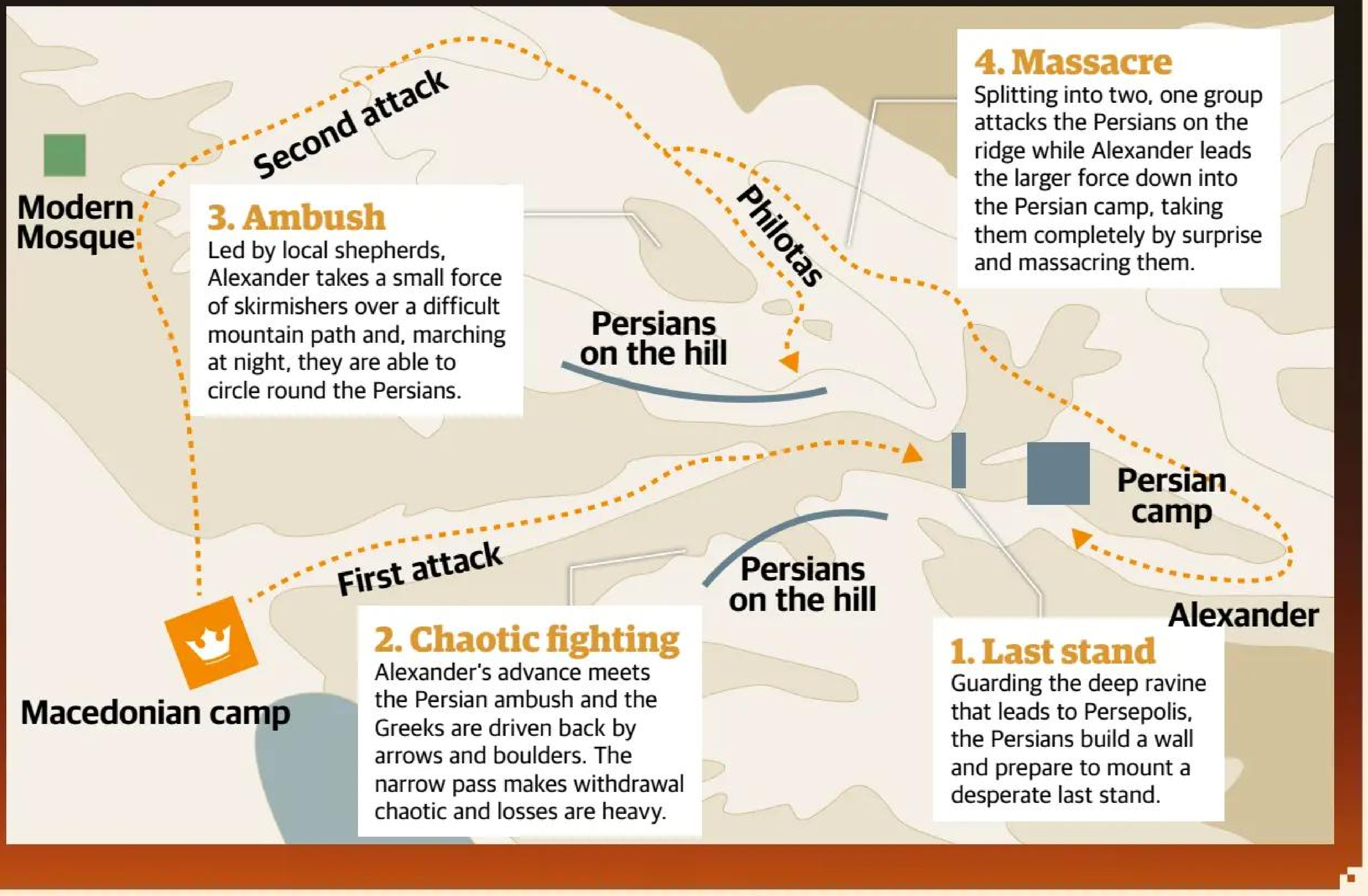
How did Alexander deploy them?

Macedonia's elite commandos, the Hypaspists carried large round shields, thrusting spears and swords, and were placed on the flank of the Foot Companions for their protection. Devastating in closed spaces.

BATTLE OF THE PERSIAN GATE (330 BCE)

Alexander turns defeat into victory to take the Persian capital

Failure could have left Alexander's Persia divided between the Macedonian king and usurper Bessus, vulnerable to revolt and invasion from central Asia. Despite a rare crushing defeat in the bloody bottleneck of the Persian ambush, Alexander was able to make use of local knowledge as well as his hardy skirmishers and turn the wild terrain in his favour, ambushing the Persians in turn and decimating them with his two forces. Historians have called this victory 'complete' and 'decisive', and it left him able to take the ancient capital of Persepolis unopposed and claim its massive wealth for himself. On leaving the city, he burnt it to the ground.



4. Massacre
Splitting into two, one group attacks the Persians on the ridge while Alexander leads the larger force down into the Persian camp, taking them completely by surprise and massacring them.

3. Ambush
Led by local shepherds, Alexander takes a small force of skirmishers over a difficult mountain path and, marching at night, they are able to circle round the Persians.

2. Chaotic fighting
Alexander's advance meets the Persian ambush and the Greeks are driven back by arrows and boulders. The narrow pass makes withdrawal chaotic and losses are heavy.

1. Last stand
Guarding the deep ravine that leads to Persepolis, the Persians build a wall and prepare to mount a desperate last stand.

Left A painting showing Alexander the Great and his forces battling an Indian army

a fiction, and only a handful of frontier provinces remained in the usurper's blood-slick hands. The once glorious Persian Empire, for 220 years the largest in the ancient world, had died by the roadside, humiliated and betrayed.

Taking the capital Persepolis after a last-ditch attempt to hold back the Greeks at a narrow pass called the Persian Gates, the power-drunk Alexander burnt the great palace to the ground in, it is believed, retaliation for the Persian sack of Athens in 480 BCE. Casting the first torch into the building himself, looting and burning spread across the city. Priests were murdered and Persian women forced to marry his soldiers. Zoroastrian prophecy had foretold "demons with dishevelled hair, of the race of wrath" and now, Persia's holy men realised, the demons were here.

As his predecessor Darius had been, Bessus was chased down by the ferocious and dogmatic Alexander into what is now Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. Across deserts with little supplies, Alexander rode along his lines, picking up men who fell and lifting their spirits. A charismatic leader even against the backdrop of the bloodiest of campaigns, he had the power to inspire his weary soldiers. Eventually, Bessus' support collapsed. With no army worth a damn, he had been forced to burn crops and stores before the Greek advance in a last-ditch attempt to slow Alexander's terrible pursuit. Fittingly for the betrayer of the last Shahanshah, his own men handed him over to the Greeks. His nose and ears were cut off at Alexander's command, and he was sent back to Persia in chains to be impaled, the Persian punishment for traitors.

This rampage across Persia and her furthest fringes wasn't the first time Alexander's determination had taken on a more murderous hue. In 334 BCE, he had marched his men into the sea up to their chins rather than turn back along the beach, only surviving because the tide began to change direction with the wind, and in 332 BCE this sheer bloody-mindedness joined forces with his ruthlessness at Tyre - the first of many appalling massacres. Refusing to surrender and believing their island fortress was impregnable from land, Alexander laid siege, blockaded the port from the Persian navy and over seven months built a causeway from the mainland to the city - an incredible feat of engineering that allowed his catapults to come within range of the city. Tyre was soon breached, and Alexander's fury fell upon the city's population. Of the 40,000 inhabitants of Tyre, 2,000 were crucified on the beach, 4,000 were killed in the fighting, a handful were pardoned and over 30,000 sold into slavery.

This act of impossible engineering and bloody vengeance was later repeated in northern India at the Battle of Aornos in 327 BCE, where the crossing of a mountain ravine by improvised wooden bridge - built over seven days and seven nights - was followed by the massacre of the tribal Aśvakas. Welcoming Alexander with open arms, the Greek-speaking Branchidae were set upon when it became known their ancestors had collaborated with the Achaemenids, while other defenders were murdered because they surrendered too late, or had been promised safe passage to lure them from behind their walls and into the spears of the Macedonian phalanx.

Like arterial spray on armour, growing accounts of sackings, burnings, enslavement and murder pepper the record of Alexander in gore. It seemed like the further he got from home, the darker his deeds became.

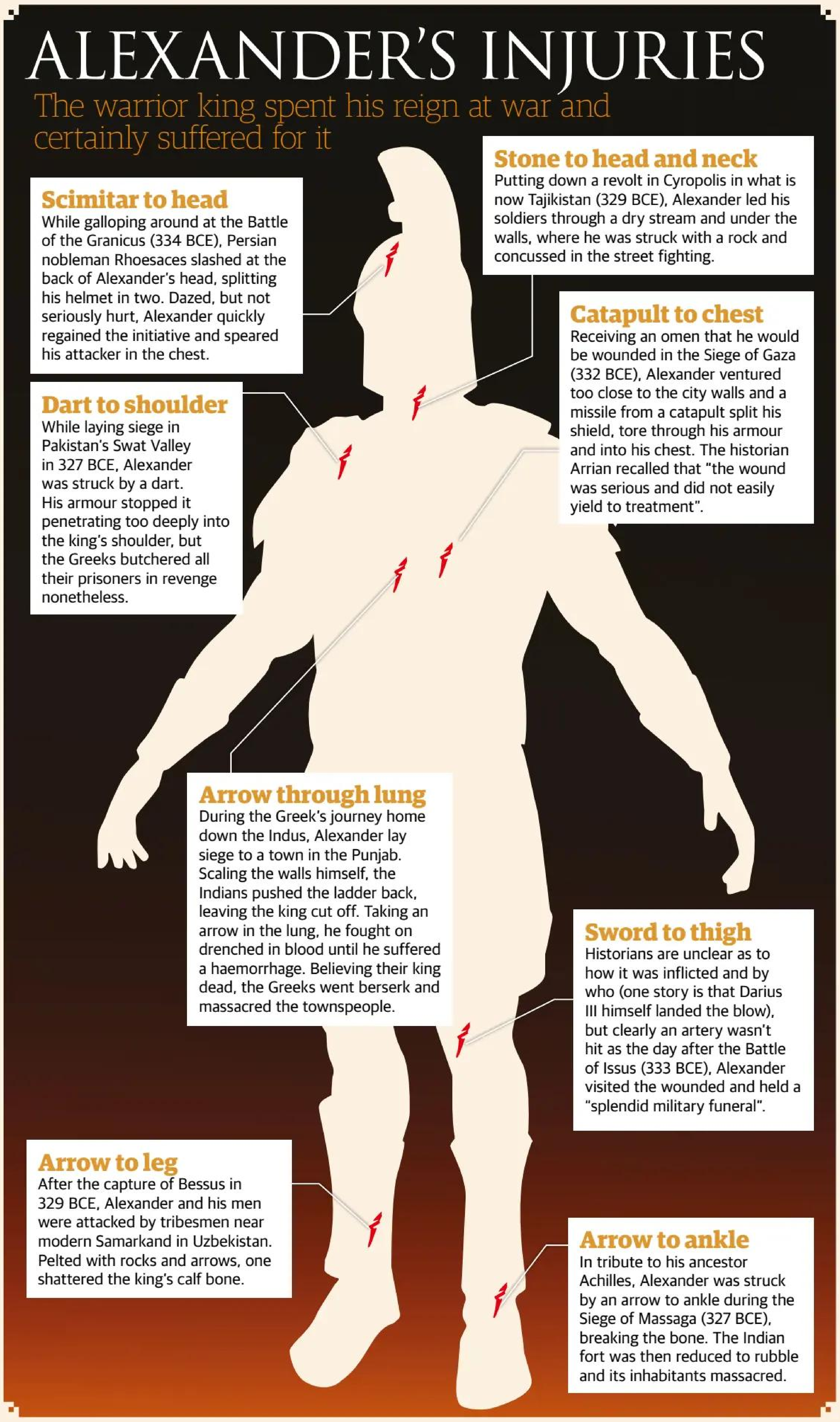
While the rewards of conquest - plunder, wives, riches and glory - had been great, the Greeks were

6. Light cavalry

Strengths
Easily replaced; some horse archers.

Weaknesses
Variable equipment and training; light armour of leather or linen.

How did Alexander deploy them?
A combination of lighter armed and armoured cavalry from the other Greek states and local horsemen conscripted in Asia. Deployed dependant on weapons and training, Alexander came to rely on them as the traditional Greek heavy cavalry dwindled.



ALEXANDER'S INJURIES

The warrior king spent his reign at war and certainly suffered for it

Scimitar to head
While galloping around at the Battle of the Granicus (334 BCE), Persian nobleman Rhoesaces slashed at the back of Alexander's head, splitting his helmet in two. Dazed, but not seriously hurt, Alexander quickly regained the initiative and speared his attacker in the chest.

Stone to head and neck
Putting down a revolt in Cyropolis in what is now Tajikistan (329 BCE), Alexander led his soldiers through a dry stream and under the walls, where he was struck with a rock and concussed in the street fighting.

Dart to shoulder
While laying siege in Pakistan's Swat Valley in 327 BCE, Alexander was struck by a dart. His armour stopped it penetrating too deeply into the king's shoulder, but the Greeks butchered all their prisoners in revenge nonetheless.

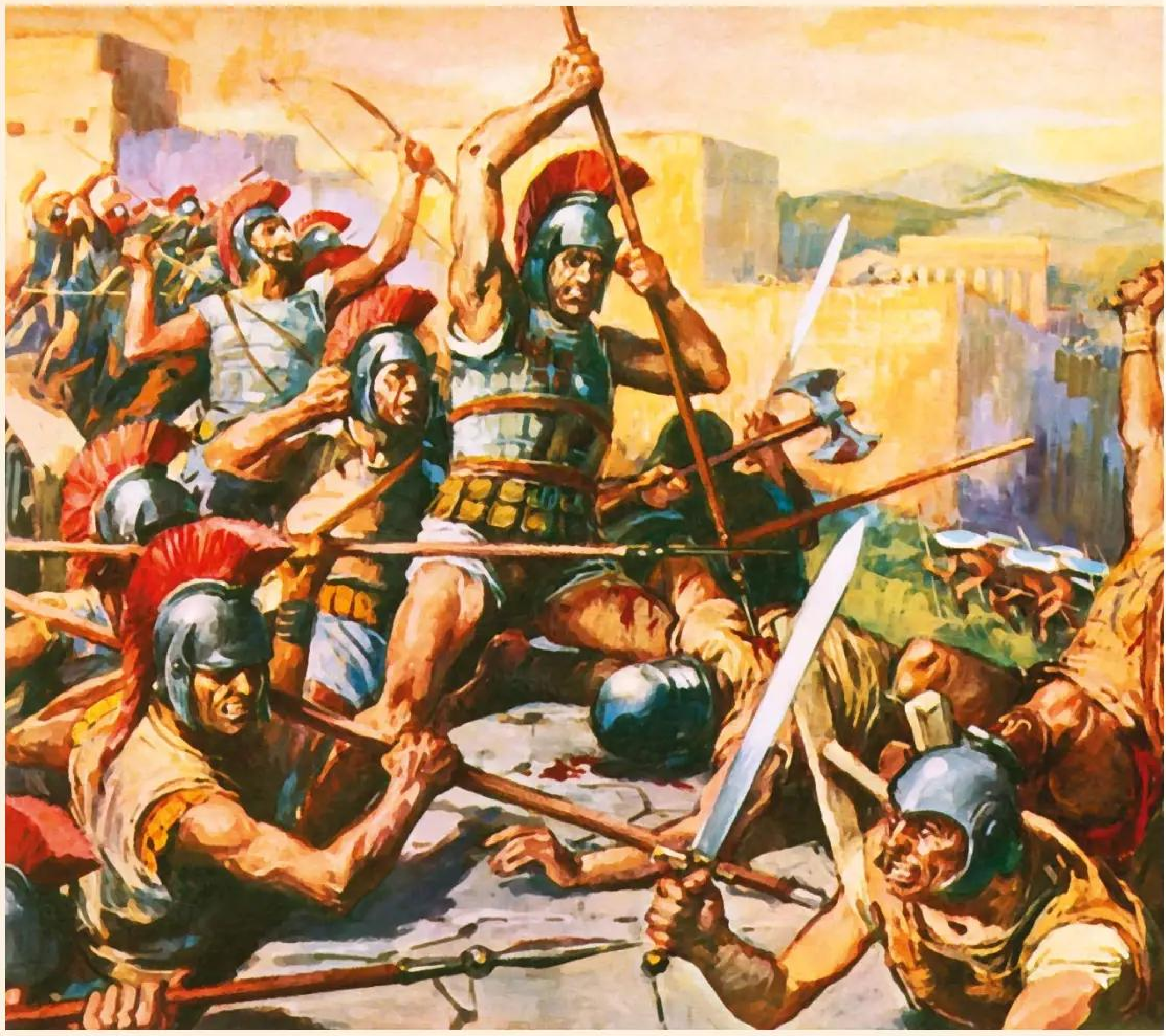
Catapult to chest
Receiving an omen that he would be wounded in the Siege of Gaza (332 BCE), Alexander ventured too close to the city walls and a missile from a catapult split his shield, tore through his armour and into his chest. The historian Arrian recalled that "the wound was serious and did not easily yield to treatment".

Arrow through lung
During the Greek's journey home down the Indus, Alexander lay siege to a town in the Punjab. Scaling the walls himself, the Indians pushed the ladder back, leaving the king cut off. Taking an arrow in the lung, he fought on drenched in blood until he suffered a haemorrhage. Believing their king dead, the Greeks went berserk and massacred the townspeople.

Sword to thigh
Historians are unclear as to how it was inflicted and by who (one story is that Darius III himself landed the blow), but clearly an artery wasn't hit as the day after the Battle of Issus (333 BCE), Alexander visited the wounded and held a "splendid military funeral".

Arrow to leg
After the capture of Bessus in 329 BCE, Alexander and his men were attacked by tribesmen near modern Samarkand in Uzbekistan. Pelted with rocks and arrows, one shattered the king's calf bone.

Arrow to ankle
In tribute to his ancestor Achilles, Alexander was struck by an arrow to ankle during the Siege of Massaga (327 BCE), breaking the bone. The Indian fort was then reduced to rubble and its inhabitants massacred.



Above Alexander the Great's army defeat the Greek city state of Thebes, 335 BCE

beginning to tire not just of this endless war that had taken them further and further from home, but Alexander's increasing pretensions. This monarch from Greece's barbarian hinterland had begun to dress in Persian robes, train Persians for the army and insist on courtiers throwing themselves to the ground in the manner of subjects before the Persian king of kings – an affront to the dignity of the Greeks, who took pride in never bowing to their monarchs. On top of that, he now wished to be worshipped as a god.

After one drunken celebration in 328 BCE, this discontent found voice when Cleitus the Black, an old Macedonian general who had served under Philip II and saved Alexander's life in battle, decided he'd had his fill. The general bristled, turned to Alexander, and told him that he would be nothing without the accomplishments of Philip, and all that he now possessed was earned by the blood and sacrifice of Macedonians. Alexander, more petulant than entirely regal in his fury, threw an apple at the general's head, called for his guards and then for a dagger or spear, but wary of escalation, those present quickly began bustling Cleitus from the room and tried to calm their monarch. Either Cleitus wasn't fully removed or then returned, but having clearly passed the point of no return, continued to vent his spleen, until Alexander, finally grabbing hold of a javelin, threw it clean through the old warhorse's heart.

Cleitus was one of the first to challenge the king, but he wasn't the last. In 327 BCE, a plot against him was betrayed, and the conspirators – his own royal pages – stoned to death. Then, later that year he struck another body blow against his traditional supporters. Callisthenes, grand-nephew of Alexander's tutor Aristotle and one of the many historians in Alexander's retinue, had become increasingly critical of his delusions of grandeur, and taunted him with a line from his beloved *Iliad*: "A better man than you by far was Patroclus, and still death did not escape him." In short – you're no god, and you'll die just like the rest of us. Alexander accused Callisthenes of collusion in the pages' conspiracy, and had him put to death.

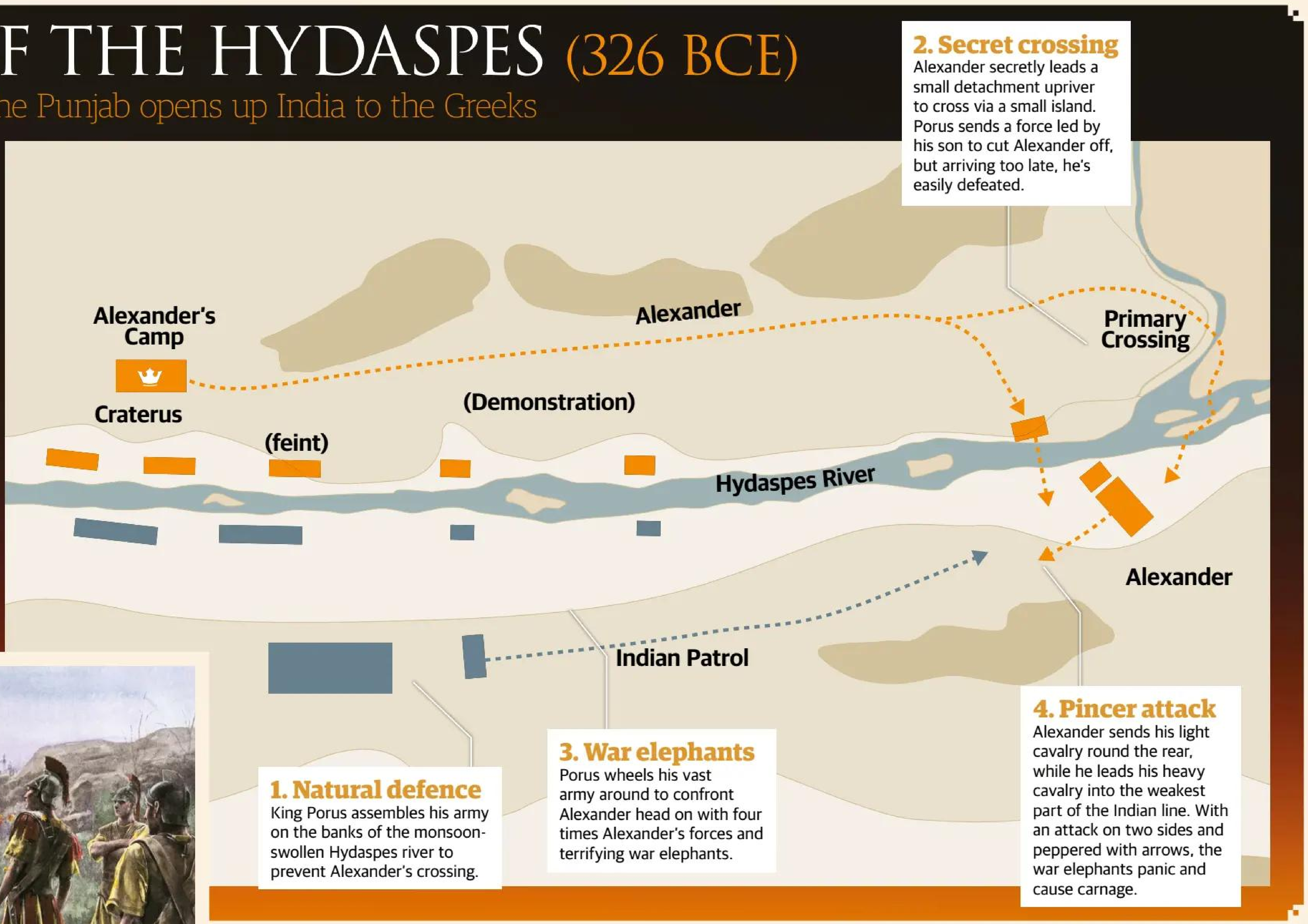
It was the beginning of the end. Convinced he was a god, it would be the needs of men that would bring the conquests of Alexander to heel. Adamant that they were at the edge of the world and expecting to see the great sea that the Ancient Greeks believed ringed their continent from which they could return home, Alexander pushed his increasingly mutinous army into India. Confronted with valley after valley of new lands to conquer and battles to wage, they drove on – winning a costly victory against 200 war elephants fielded by King Porus on the banks of the Indus River. Battered and broken after 22,000 kilometres and eight years, monsoon season arrived and drenched the army in water and disease. Rumours also reached the camp that India was bigger than they had previously heard, and contained armies even greater than that of Porus.

Alexander's generals, mindful of the fate that had befallen other critics of their king, approached cautiously and appealed to his nobility. Coenus – one of Alexander's most trusted commanders – implored him to let them return home to their families, saying so eloquently, "We have achieved

BATTLE OF THE HYDASPES (326 BCE)

Alexander's battle for the Punjab opens up India to the Greeks

Despite leaving him with 1,000 Greek dead, Alexander was eventually able to overcome the numerically superior force and deadly war elephants of King Porus. He managed to do this by using a classic pincer movement and refusal to bow down to nature – in this case, the fast-moving waters of the Hydaspes River. Porus' defeat left the Punjab region of northern India open to the Greek invaders, but the death toll would add to rumblings of mutiny in Alexander's ranks.

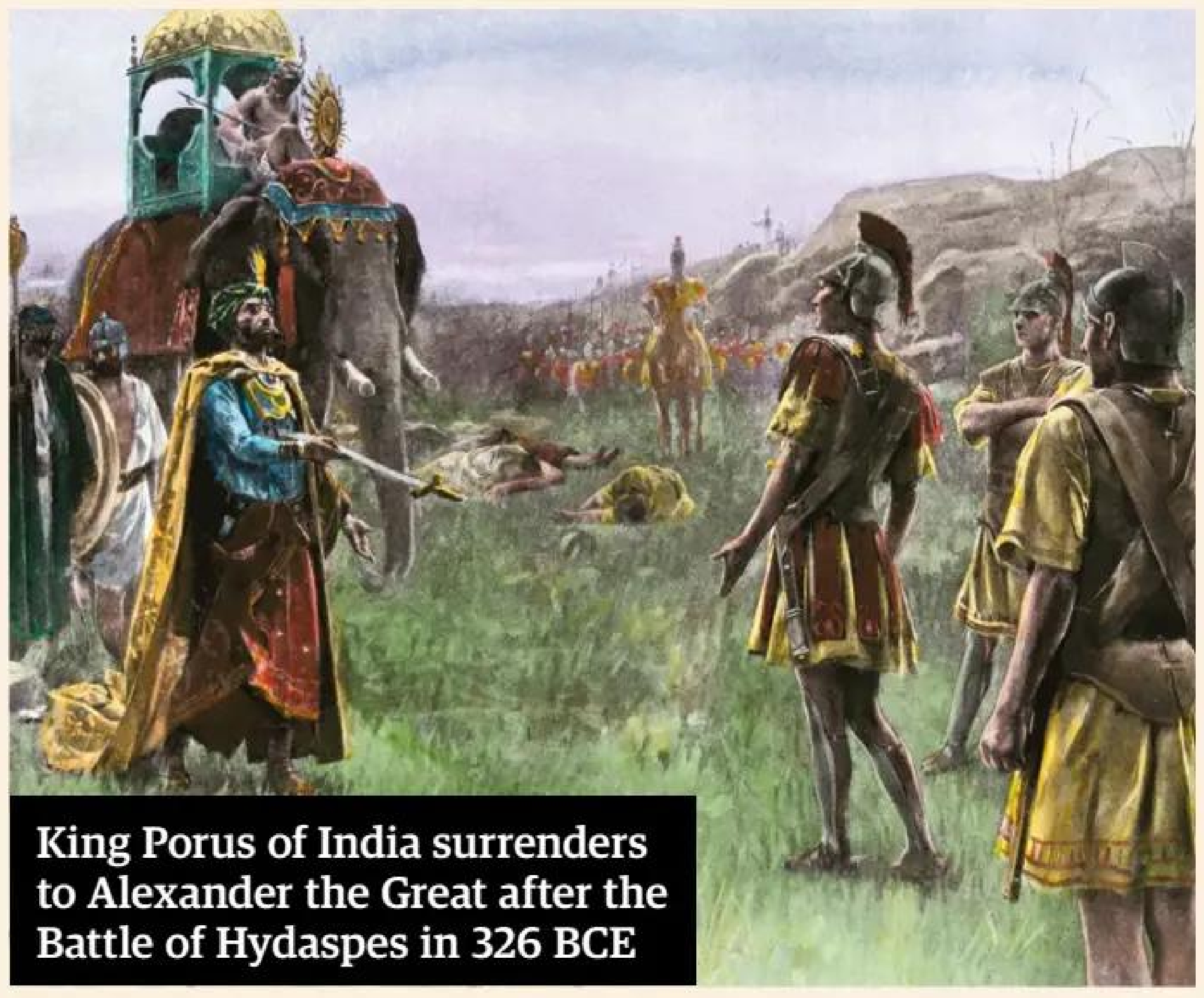


2. Secret crossing
Alexander secretly leads a small detachment upriver to cross via a small island. Porus sends a force led by his son to cut Alexander off, but arriving too late, he's easily defeated.

1. Natural defence
King Porus assembles his army on the banks of the monsoon-swollen Hydaspes river to prevent Alexander's crossing.

3. War elephants
Porus wheels his vast army around to confront Alexander head on with four times Alexander's forces and terrifying war elephants.

4. Pincer attack
Alexander sends his light cavalry round the rear, while he leads his heavy cavalry into the weakest part of the Indian line. With an attack on two sides and peppered with arrows, the war elephants panic and cause carnage.



King Porus of India surrenders to Alexander the Great after the Battle of Hydaspes in 326 BCE

> "Alexander had to be sailed past his army while lined up on the riverbank before they would accept he was still alive"

so many marvellous successes, but isn't it time to set some limit? Surely you can see yourself how few are left of the original army that began this enterprise… Sire," he concluded, "the sign of a great man is knowing when to stop."

Reluctantly, the warrior king agreed. Building a temple to Dionysus on the riverbank and leaving the inscription 'Alexander stopped here', they built a fleet of flat-bottom ships and began a long voyage home. Alexander the Great's conquest began with Homer's *Iliad* as its guide – a tale of triumph and conquest – and ended with the *Odyssey* – a desperate voyage home.

There were more tragedies and triumphs to come, and many would never see home thanks to the long-running battles with the Indian kingdoms they passed through on their way down the Indus River toward the Arabian Sea, from where they could sail to Persia's southern coast. One battle in early 325 BCE against the Malhi people of Punjab nearly cost Alexander his life as a siege ladder collapsed behind him, leaving him stranded on enemy ramparts, with his bodyguard panicking below. Even with his dreams of ceaseless conquest doused like campfires before battle, Alexander fought fiercely until an arrow pierced his lung, his chroniclers describing air escaping with the blood.

Even with all Alexander had subjected them to, his army remained devoted to their monarch - believing him dead, they rampaged through the city, looting, killing and burning in retaliation. Patched up by his doctor, gaunt and unsteady, Alexander had to be sailed past his army while lined up on the riverbank before they would accept he was still alive.

With one force exploring the Persian Gulf, Alexander led the remnants of his army through what is now the Balochistan province of Iran – a sparsely populated landscape of arid mountains and desert. His men died in their hundreds, gasping for water, stumbling through the baking sands in their tattered sandals and blinking into the brilliant Sun. By 324 BCE they had reached the Persian city of Susa, but back in the heart of the empire he had stolen, his trials continued – his childhood friend, stalwart general and, some historians have implied, lover Hephaestion died, and then in August the Macedonians in his army mutinied. The Macedonians he placated, but the grief he felt at the loss of "the friend I value with my own life" could not be so easily put right.

While his father died with dreams of a Persian conquest upon his lips, Alexander succumbed to a fever in 323 BCE with greater dreams still. Before his eyes poured the spears of the phalanx south into Arabia and west into Carthage and Rome. "Who shall lead us?" his followers whispered to their dying king. "The strongest," he replied, and with his passing the great empire splintered.

In his tactical genius, charismatic leadership, enduring legacy and fanatical drive, Alexander was far removed from those around him. Perhaps in his view, 'elevated' above those around him, he was so far removed as to be incomparable. He was never defeated in battle, partly because of his tactical skill, leadership and army, but also because he was prepared to pay a toll in human lives.

Tales of the Greek gods endure not just because they present an ideal of heroism and greatness, but because they were flawed beings – a soap opera on a cosmic scale. Like the squabbling deities of Mount Olympus, Alexander the Great was violent, vain, petty and cynical, and like them he overcame impossible odds and accomplished breathtaking feats through ingenuity, charisma, martial prowess and force of will. His example was venerated by emperors, tactics studied by leaders for over 2,000 years, and in the Middle East, tales of 'Alexander the Cursed's' savagery are still told in the lands he wronged. For good and ill, the shadow he casts is still the stuff of legend.

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THE MAURYA EMPIRE

322-185 BCE

For 136 years, the Indian subcontinent was ruled by a powerful Iron-Age dynasty established by Chandragupta Maurya. Reaching its peak under his grandson, Ashoka, who built this splendid Buddhist temple complex at Sanchi, the Mauryan Empire's population of 50 million makes it one of the largest in antiquity.

IMPERIAL CHINA

The Chinese Empire stood for millennia at the centre of the East Asian world and at the forefront of human civilisation

Written by Marc DeSantis

For centuries, China was riven by wars between the rival states. These were bitter enemies, and though there were royal dynasties during these long years, such as the semi-legendary Xia of c.2070-1600 BCE, the warrior aristocrats of the Shang who ruled from c.1600 to 1122 BCE, and the feudal Zhou of c.1046-256 BCE, actual power tended to rest in the hands of the local rulers of its many sub-kingdoms and duchies.

The land was also repeatedly beset by invaders from outside – nomadic, horse-riding peoples from the steppes of Central Asia seeking to claim a piece of China's fertile lands. Many Chinese states on the northern frontier would build long walls to keep them out.

Geographically, China, with its origin along the Yellow River, was separated from the other great world civilisations by distance and difficult terrain, such as mountains and deserts. Though there certainly was contact, the nation primarily developed along its own course without extensive influence from outside.

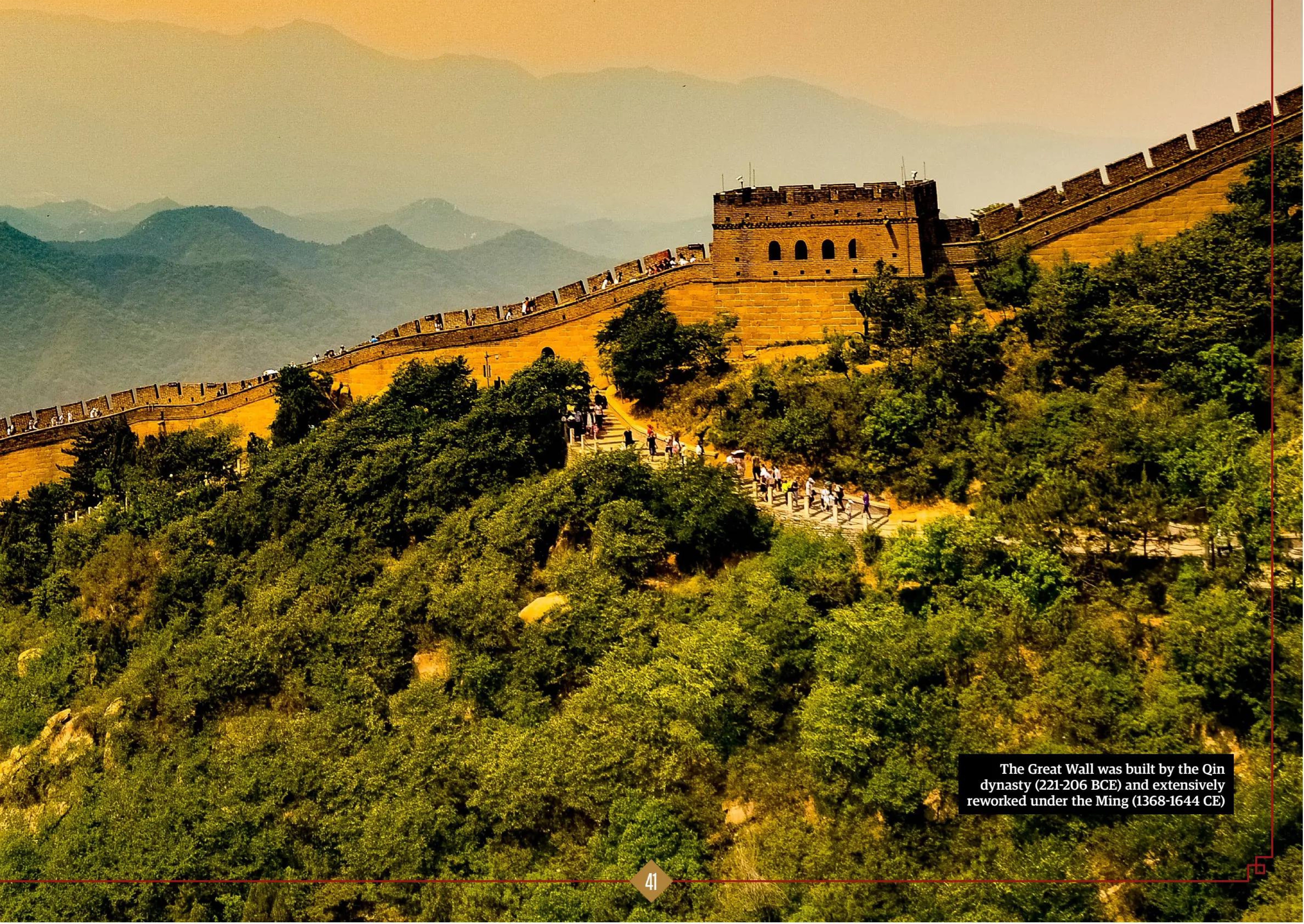
The country was always the largest polity in eastern Asia. Because of its central location, it came to see itself as the Middle Kingdom between the lesser states that clustered around it, both literally and figuratively because of its greater size and importance. Culturally, the latter period of this seemingly endless era of internal conflict, the Warring States period, was one of great achievement. It was during this time that the greatest of all Far Eastern philosophers, Confucius, lived. The teacher, editor and politician taught extensively on morality and the correct ordering of the family, society and the state.

But when it came to unifying China, this would be accomplished by the highly militaristic state of Qin, which lay on the western periphery. Qin was extremely militaristic and its soldiers were renowned for their ferocity.

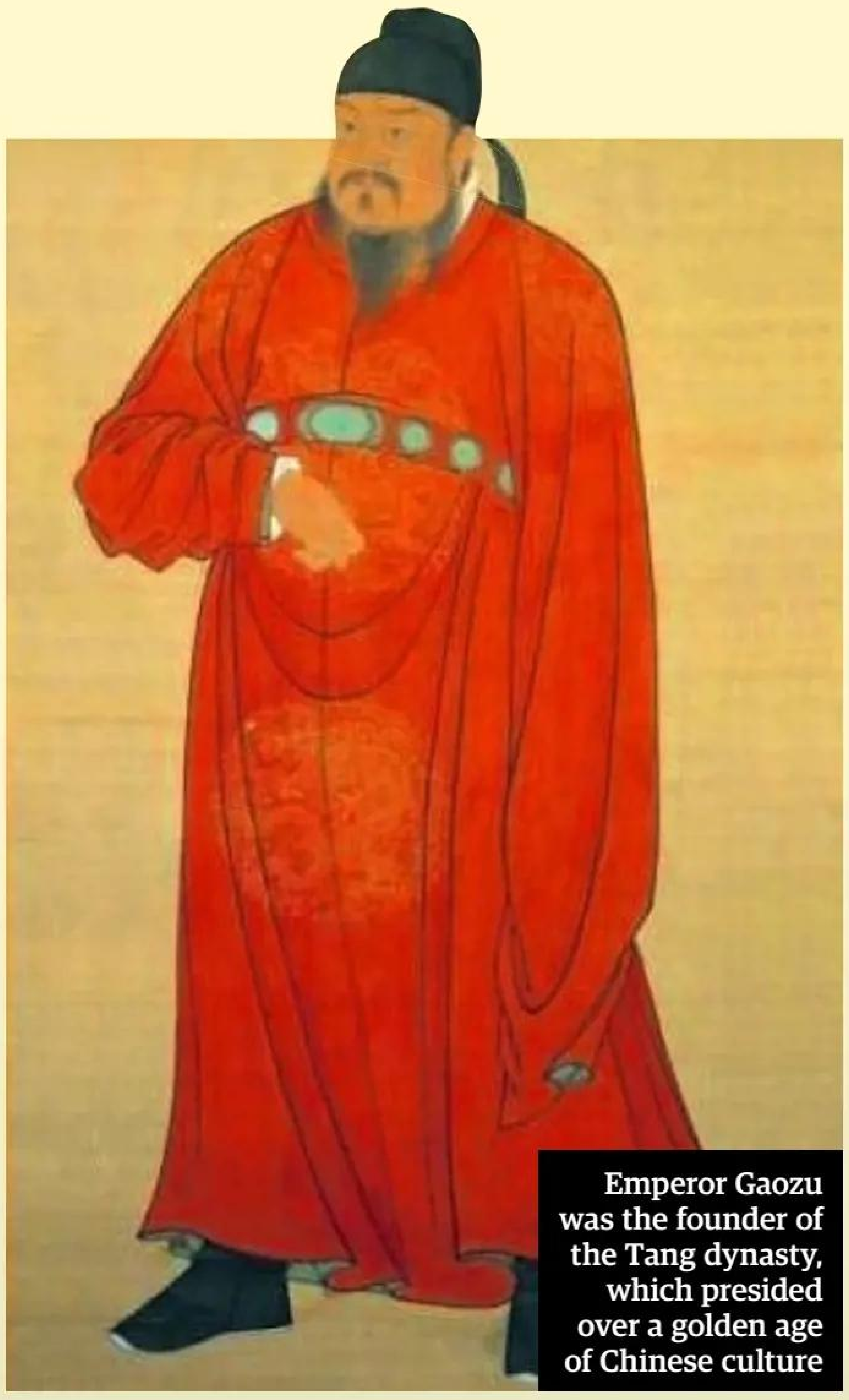
King Zheng came to power in the state in 238 BCE and rapidly gobbled up his neighbours' lands with his massive and powerful army, including Chu, Zhao and lastly Qi in 221 BCE. China was finally brought together under one sole ruler. Zheng took for himself the title Qin Shi Huangdi, or First Emperor Qin, and in this position he was elevated above the old kings of the Shang and Zhou. He also adopted the ancient idea that he, as the Son of Heaven, enjoyed the Mandate of Heaven to rule.

Qin got to work building the first version of the Great Wall of China, though at an enormous cost in lives. He codified Chinese law, standardised weights and measures, and developed a common written language. He also built thousands of miles of roads to connect the once-separate states. But he was extremely paranoid – perhaps with good reason as he had been the target of assassins before. He ruled as a tyrant, harsh and cruel. Huge numbers of intellectuals were killed and books burned to destroy the unapproved knowledge in them. The tyranny of Qin soon fostered revolts and his dynasty would be short-lived.

Qin's usurper would rise from humble beginnings. The peasant-born Liu Bang, the founder of what would become the Han dynasty – which reigned from 202 BCE to 220 CE – was



The Great Wall was built by the Qin dynasty (221-206 BCE) and extensively reworked under the Ming (1368-1644 CE)


Emperor Gaozu was the founder of the Tang dynasty, which presided over a golden age of Chinese culture

originally a police official in Jiangsu until he became a major leader of rebel forces against the hated Qin. Upon becoming emperor, he took the throne name Han Gaozu.

The greatest of his descendants was Emperor Wudi, who conquered huge territories and incorporated them into the empire, as well as beginning the Silk Road to acquire high-quality horses for his cavalry from Central Asia. Confucianism became the guiding philosophy of government and society, and entry into prestigious civil service was permitted by competitive examinations. It was also a period of technological innovation, seeing the appearance of silk production and paper-making, and the invention of the wheelbarrow and the ploughshare.

However, the Han weakened over the centuries. The economy worsened and military problems multiplied – especially on the northern frontier where nomadic peoples stood ready to raid China whenever possible. The Han collapse began in 189 CE with an army rebellion. The capital of Loyang was sacked, together with the imperial palace. The last of the Han emperors gave up his throne in 220 CE, but over three and a half centuries of chaos and division ensued. The influence of the Han was undeniably enormous. Today, most Chinese call themselves Han after this remarkable dynasty.

> “The revolt was suppressed but only after eight bloody years, leaving the Tang severely weakened”

After the collapse of the Han, the Three Kingdoms Period followed. Control of China was divided between three states: Wei, Wu and Shu. The north of the country was overrun by invaders from the steppe, and petty warlords of non-Chinese origin ruled over numerous regions.

Yang Jian became the ruler of a reunited China in 589 CE and took the throne name of Sui Wendi. He had been the Duke of Sui, and initially served in the government of a small state, the Northern Zhou. In 581 he convinced its child emperor to abdicate and then announced himself to be the new Son of Heaven. He defeated the last of his opponents in the Chen dynasty in 589, thus beginning the Sui dynasty.

The approximately 1,800-kilometre-long Grand Canal from Beijing to Hangzhou, connecting the Yellow River with the Yangtze River, was constructed by the Sui. The dynasty quickly faltered when a terrible flood ravaged the country, convincing many that Heaven had withdrawn its mandate from the Sui and sparking a number of uprisings. Like the birth of the Han, one rebel leader would soon sit on the throne.

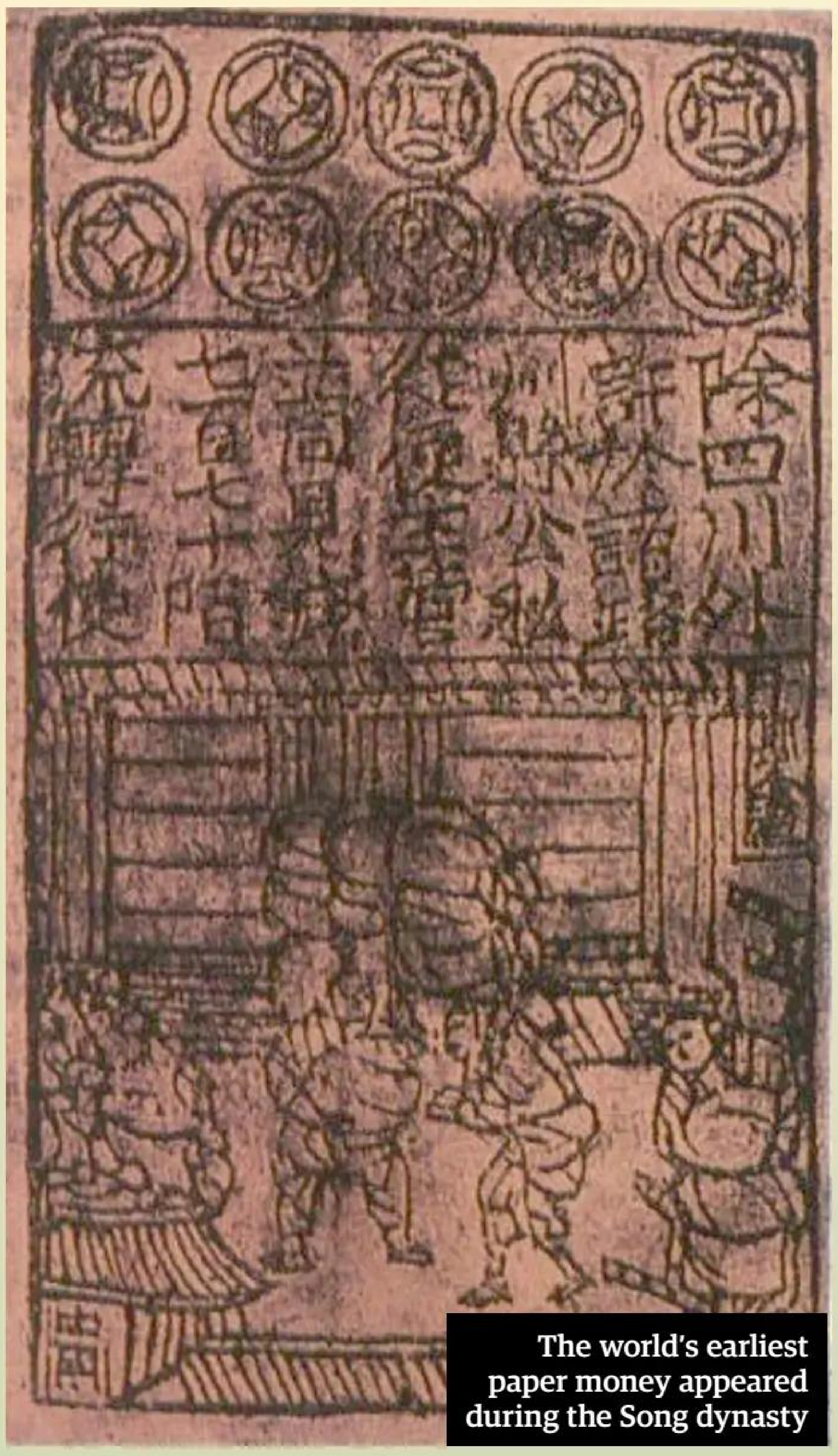
The Sui would be succeeded by the Tang dynasty from 618 to 907 when Li Yuan, a Sui general, seized the capital city of Chang'an on the Yellow River in 618. Ruling as Tang Gaozu, he would remain on the throne for eight years. The Tang dynasty he founded presided over a golden age of cultural brilliance during which the arts, literature and scholarship flourished. The vast wealth of the empire owed much to imperial stability, and foreigners from all directions came bearing goods to trade. In accordance with age-old tradition, admission to the imperial civil service was governed by competitive examination.

Like all golden ages, this one too came to an end. A Turkic general, An Lu-shan, raised his standard in rebellion in 755. The revolt was suppressed but only after eight bloody years, leaving the Tang severely weakened. Power fell into the hands of local officials and aristocrats, and the Tang emperors' control over the huge empire was never as secure as it had once been. The dynasty failed in 907, ushering in a half-century of disorder.

For about five decades, 907-960, known as the Five Dynasties Era, China was ruled by a welter of small states, but this period of division came to an end in 960 with the rise of the Song. One Taizu, the former commander of the palace guard, founded the dynasty and the empire was reassembled. The period would be one of enormous economic growth and great technological progress.

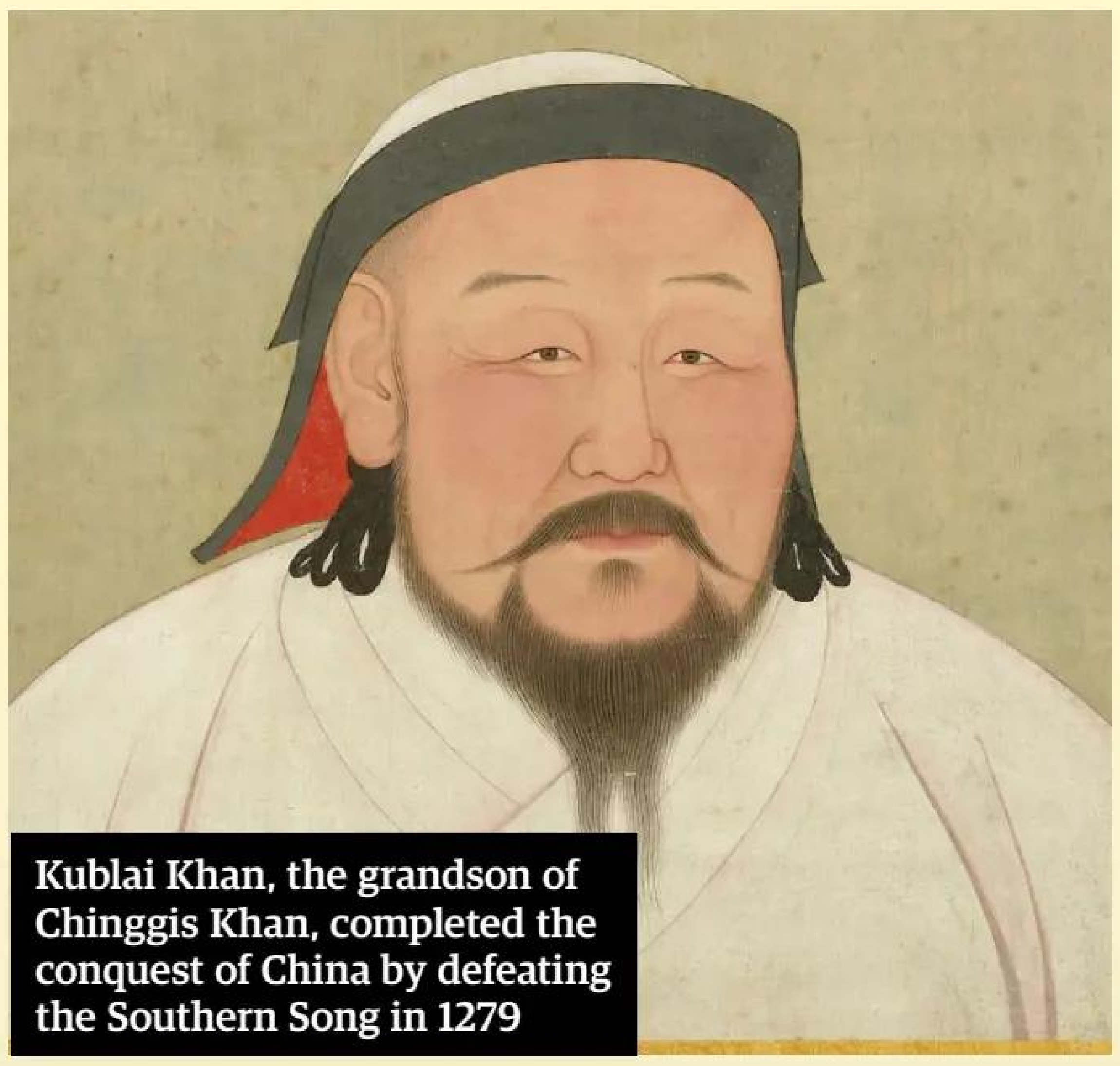
It was not without its problems, however. In the north, the Song were troubled by the nomads of the steppe who had settled on large tracts of Chinese territory. Foremost among these were the non-Chinese Khitans of the Liao dynasty from Manchuria. In the far west, there were troubles with the Tibetans. Later, the Jurchen of the Jin dynasty vexed China's rulers and dominated extensive areas of northern China. By the 12th century, northern China had largely been lost to the Khitans, and the Southern Song, as the dynasty later became known, ruled only the lands south of the Yangtze River.

The most dangerous of all of the northern steppe nomads to come up against China were the Mongols. United in 1206 under their greatest leader, Genghis Khan, Mongol cavalry armies swept into northern China and overwhelmed the various non-Chinese dynasties that ruled there. After completing the conquest of north China, the Mongols turned west and stormed in the Middle East, their hard-riding armies reaching as far west as Hungary, Poland, and Russia, smashing European opponents. The Mongols created a ‘world empire’ of which China was a major part.


The world's earliest paper money appeared during the Song dynasty

The conquest of the Southern Song would take longer, and would not be completed until later in the century during the reign of Kublai Khan, Genghis' grandson, who would found China's Yuan dynasty, which reigned from 1271 to 1368.

The Silk Road flourished with the stability and security that the Mongols provided. It was during this period, in the late 13th century, that the famed Italian traveller Marco Polo journeyed from Venice to China.



Kublai Khan, the grandson of Chinggis Khan, completed the conquest of China by defeating the Southern Song in 1279

In time, the Mongols succumbed to the lure of superior Chinese culture and became sinicised, but not all of their military ventures were successful – two invasions of Japan in the latter 13th century ended in abject failure. Sitting in comfortable Chinese garrisons, the Mongol soldiers themselves became soft, a far cry from their hardy ancestors who had conquered China on horseback. Revolts among the native Chinese, who resisted Mongol rule, broke out. In 1368, Beijing was captured by rebels and the Yuan dynasty was finished.

The Ming dynasty came next. Its first emperor, Hongwu, had been born a peasant named Zhu Yuanzhang but rose to become the leader of a rebel band that captured Nanjing in 1356, which became the imperial capital. By 1368, he had captured Beijing, with the last of the Mongol leaders fleeing before his approach.

Between 1403 and 1424, the Ming built a large portion of the structure that is today most commonly thought of as the Great Wall. Great seafaring expeditions under Admiral Zheng He were sent out, visiting foreign nations in giant 'treasure ships' as far away as India, the Persian Gulf and Africa between 1405 and 1433.

Yet the Ming were uninterested in continuing these expensive voyages and Chinese sea power atrophied. Later it would become vulnerable to Japanese pirates and overtaken at sea by Western Europeans, such as the Portuguese and Spanish, who began to appear in China in the 16th century.

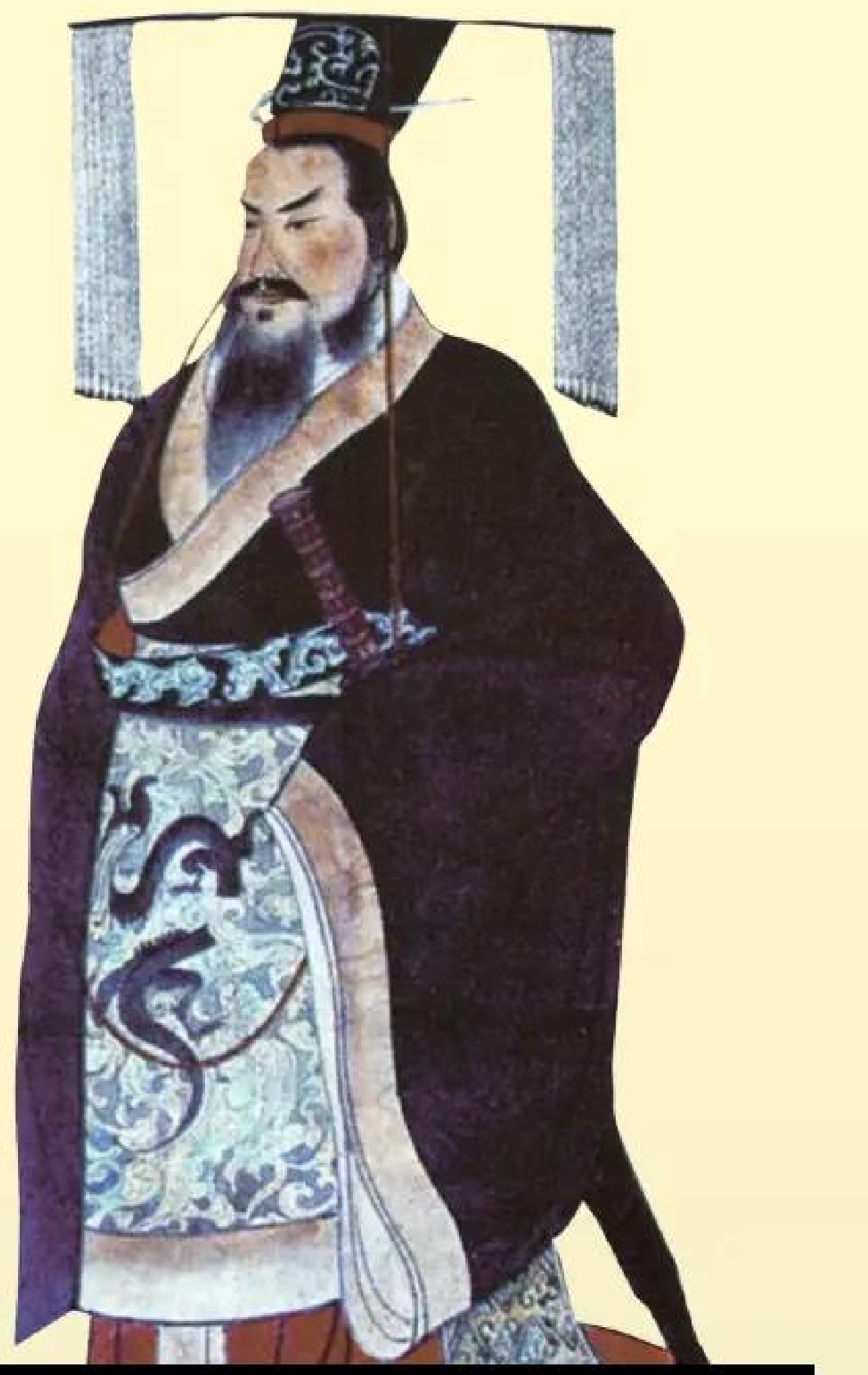
By the early 16th century the Ming empire was tottering. Peace had brought about a big increase in population, but this meant that there were more people than the land could easily support, and rebellions occurred. The northern tribes were constantly making trouble on the frontier, and Japanese pirates raided China's coasts at will. The Ming were incapable of coping with them all. Revolts broke out and the Manchus of Manchuria took advantage of the chaos and captured Beijing in 1644. China was once more ruled by foreigners.

The Manchus founded the country's last dynasty, the Qing, which would govern China until the collapse of imperialism in 1912. Durings its rule, the outside world begin to impinge more forcefully, despite the Qing's resistance to change. Western nations, undergoing their own industrialisation, began to insist on favourable trading relations and as such, the country began to weaken.

China suffered defeat in both the First and Second Opium Wars in the mid 1800s, which were fought largely over the opium trade of Britain with China, and subsequently lost much of its sovereignty in the treaties that followed. But the humiliation didn't stop there; China was incapable of protecting itself from foreign aggression and was overpowered by Japan's modern military in the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95. Then the anti-foreign Boxer Rebellion of 1899-1901 was crushed by the armies of several foreign powers – China was practically helpless.

Revolts against the foreign and decrepit Qing dynasty multiplied and the last emperor, Pu Yi, formally abdicated in 1912. One revolt was led by Sun Yat-sen, who had lived in the United States as a young man, and he became the leader of the newly proclaimed Republic of China in 1912. And thus, the imperial system that had prevailed in China for over 2,000 years was finally finished.

The ruins of a Han dynasty watchtower at Dunhuang in western China



First Emperor Qin codified Chinese law and developed a common written language for the new empire

Key events and rulers

221 BCE

Unification of China

The ruthless King Zheng of Qin becomes the first ruler of a unified China. He declares himself emperor.

139 BCE

Heavenly horses

Emperor Wudi of the Han dynasty sends a mission to find quality horses for his army in Central Asia.

589

China reunited

After over three centuries of division, the Chinese Empire is reunited by Emperor Sui Wendi.

960

Founding of the Song dynasty

Song emperor Taizu unites China after over 40 years of disunity.

1209

Mongol invasions of China

The mounted Mongol army invades north China beginning in 1209.

1661

Ascension of the Kangxi emperor

Kangxi, the longest-reigning Chinese emperor of the Qing dynasty, comes to the imperial throne. He reigns until 1722.

1839-1842

First Opium War

China and Britain go to war over diplomatic relations and trade. The British ultimately defeat a weakened Qing China in 1842.

1912

Republic of China

Sun Yat-sen becomes the leader of the Republic of China, bringing the country's imperial era to an end.

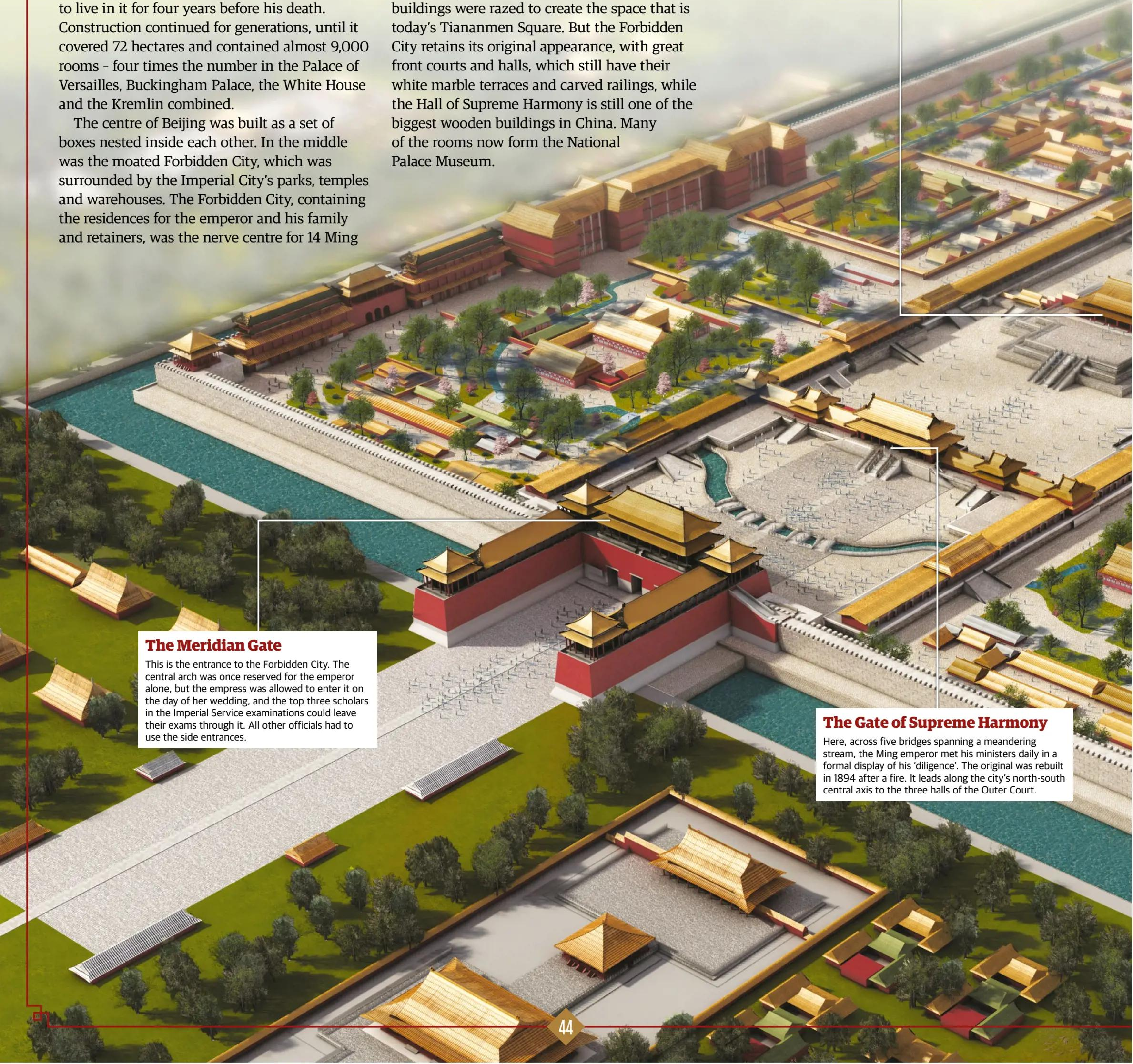
THE FORBIDDEN CITY

A fortress of palaces and gardens

When Yongle of Ming decided to restore Beijing as the imperial capital, his aim was strategic: to oversee the northern frontier marked by the Great Wall. He ordered a palace more stupendous than anything that had come before. It took most of his reign to build, but was far enough advanced by 1420 for the emperor to live in it for four years before his death. Construction continued for generations, until it covered 72 hectares and contained almost 9,000 rooms – four times the number in the Palace of Versailles, Buckingham Palace, the White House and the Kremlin combined.

The centre of Beijing was built as a set of boxes nested inside each other. In the middle was the moated Forbidden City, which was surrounded by the Imperial City's parks, temples and warehouses. The Forbidden City, containing the residences for the emperor and his family and retainers, was the nerve centre for 14 Ming emperors and ten Qing emperors until 1912. Its axis is the Imperial Way, linking the Outer Court, once used for ceremonies, and the Inner Court, for imperial residences and administration.

Today, the surrounding Imperial City is very different from the original and most of the walls and gate towers have gone. In the 1950s, buildings were razed to create the space that is today's Tiananmen Square. But the Forbidden City retains its original appearance, with great front courts and halls, which still have their white marble terraces and carved railings, while the Hall of Supreme Harmony is still one of the biggest wooden buildings in China. Many of the rooms now form the National Palace Museum.



The Hall of Supreme Harmony

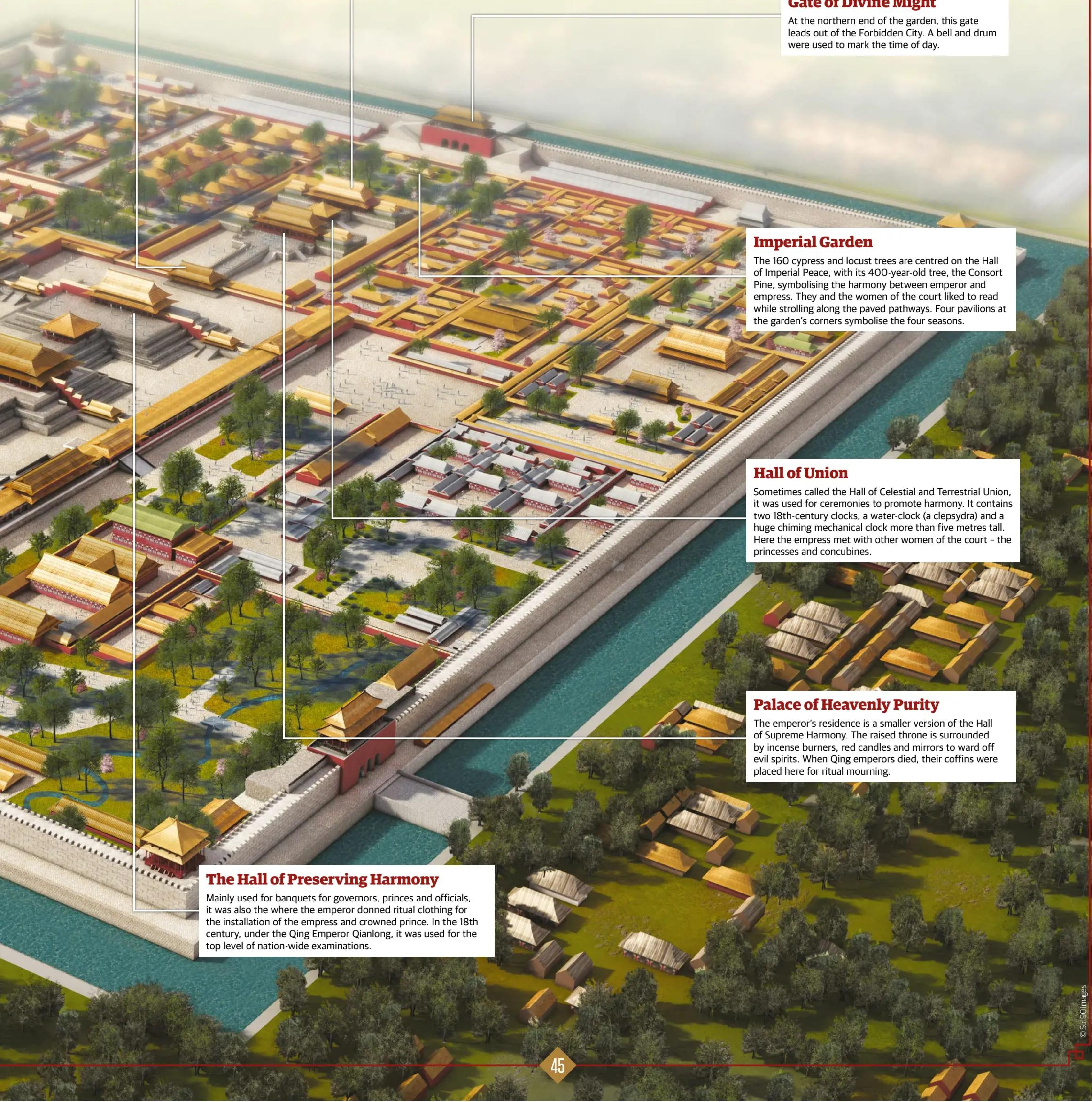
The smallest of the three Outer Court halls, this was used as an antechamber and imperial rest room. A throne is flanked by gargoyles of unicorns, as symbols of wisdom. After being burned down three times, the hall was restored for the last time in 1627 in its original form.

The Meridian Gate

This is the entrance to the Forbidden City. The central arch was once reserved for the emperor alone, but the empress was allowed to enter it on the day of her wedding, and the top three scholars in the Imperial Service examinations could leave their exams through it. All other officials had to use the side entrances.

The Gate of Supreme Harmony

Here, across five bridges spanning a meandering stream, the Ming emperor met his ministers daily in a formal display of his 'diligence'. The original was rebuilt in 1894 after a fire. It leads along the city's north-south central axis to the three halls of the Outer Court.



Palace of Earthly Tranquillity

This was the empress' residence during the Ming dynasty, and in Qing times it was the wedding chamber for the emperor and empress. Since the Qing were Manchu, not Chinese, they also used the hall to worship shamanistic deities.

The Gate of Heavenly Purity

This divides the Outer from the Inner Court and is guarded by two lions with limp ears. An official website claims that, "These two lions with flipperty-flopperty ears alarm the Inner Court concubines and court ladies," warning them to avoid the Outer Court and its concerns with government.

Gate of Divine Might

At the northern end of the garden, this gate leads out of the Forbidden City. A bell and drum were used to mark the time of day.

Imperial Garden

The 160 cypress and locust trees are centred on the Hall of Imperial Peace, with its 400-year-old tree, the Consort Pine, symbolising the harmony between emperor and empress. They and the women of the court liked to read while strolling along the paved pathways. Four pavilions at the garden's corners symbolise the four seasons.

Hall of Union

Sometimes called the Hall of Celestial and Terrestrial Union, it was used for ceremonies to promote harmony. It contains two 18th-century clocks, a water-clock (a clepsydra) and a huge chiming mechanical clock more than five metres tall. Here the empress met with other women of the court – the princesses and concubines.

Palace of Heavenly Purity

The emperor's residence is a smaller version of the Hall of Supreme Harmony. The raised throne is surrounded by incense burners, red candles and mirrors to ward off evil spirits. When Qing emperors died, their coffins were placed here for ritual mourning.

The Hall of Preserving Harmony

Mainly used for banquets for governors, princes and officials, it was also the where the emperor donned ritual clothing for the installation of the empress and crowned prince. In the 18th century, under the Qing Emperor Qianlong, it was used for the top level of nation-wide examinations.

© Sol90 Images

Augustus, the first emperor of Rome, put the empire on a stable foundation that helped it survive for centuries after

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Rome grew from a small city beside the Tiber in Italy to become master of the Mediterranean world

Written by Marc DeSantis

Like most empires, Rome's was born in blood. At first just a little city astride the Tiber River in central Italy surrounded by enemies, Rome relentlessly expanded. Guided by the Senate, composed of the leading men, it brought the other Latin peoples of Italy into a tight federation, and by the 3rd century BCE it had humbled the Samnites of central Italy as well as the Etruscans to the north.

Expansion of the Republic of Rome further north brought the Romans into conflict with the Gauls, a Celtic people who lived in northern Italy and modern-day France, with ferocious wars being fought. In the south, the Romans came into contact with the Greeks of southern Italy, who had settled the coastal regions in centuries past. The outstanding general and king of the Molossian tribe Pyrrhus of Epirus came to the aid of his countrymen, but even his victories over the tough and obstinate Romans proved too costly for him to continue.

By 264 BCE, in the first of three bitter conflicts, Rome was at war with Carthage over the control of Sicily. Rome eventually prevailed, but only after an immensely costly struggle that lasted 23 years. A second war with Carthage, begun by its most famous son, the brilliant general Hannibal, saw Roman armies smashed and Italy invaded. Despite Hannibal's hammer blows and a war that encompassed virtually the entire western Mediterranean, Rome endured and defeated Carthage after 16 blood-soaked years.

In 146 BCE, Roman vengeance would see Carthage destroyed utterly in the third and final war with the North African empire. Rome's imperial interests had by this time grown to embrace the whole of the Mediterranean. Wars came with the grand Hellenistic Greek empires that had emerged from the wreckage of Alexander the Great's world empire of the 4th century BCE. The Macedonian, Seleucid and Ptolemaic empires were wealthy, culturally sophisticated and militarily powerful. Rome overcame them all.

Success brought its own problems. By the 2nd century BCE Italy was awash in loot gained from its defeated Greek rivals and slaves drawn from all over the Mediterranean and beyond, all taken by Rome's victorious legions. Yet inequality was now skyrocketing. Attempts at reform were stymied by the rich and powerful, who benefited from the system just as it was. Landless, impoverished peasants, who used to provide Rome with her unbeatable citizen legionaries, were thrown off their land because they were unable to pay their debts and replaced by slaves who worked giant estates owned by the wealthy. The poverty-stricken free farmers found their way to Rome, where they swelled the population and augmented the great mass of the urban poor.

Nevertheless, Rome continued to expand, but cracks in the Republic's foundations began to appear in increasing number. There were civil wars with former allies and between rival generals. This last boded especially ill for the increasingly creaky Republic. By the turn of the 1st century BCE, ultra-rich Roman aristocrats were leading armies composed of men too poor to buy their own weapons and armour. These men came to rely on their generals to look out for their welfare once they were discharged, not the government of Rome, where the Senate had become riven by bitter factionalism. A government fit for a city was proving incapable of minding what had become a world empire stretching from Spain to Palestine. Ambitious generals backed by armies loyal more to them than to Rome, such as Marius and Sulla, asserted themselves to Rome's detriment.

Foremost among these was Julius Caesar. Though something of a reformer, Caesar was mainly looking out for himself, and made

EXPANSION OF THE EMPIRE

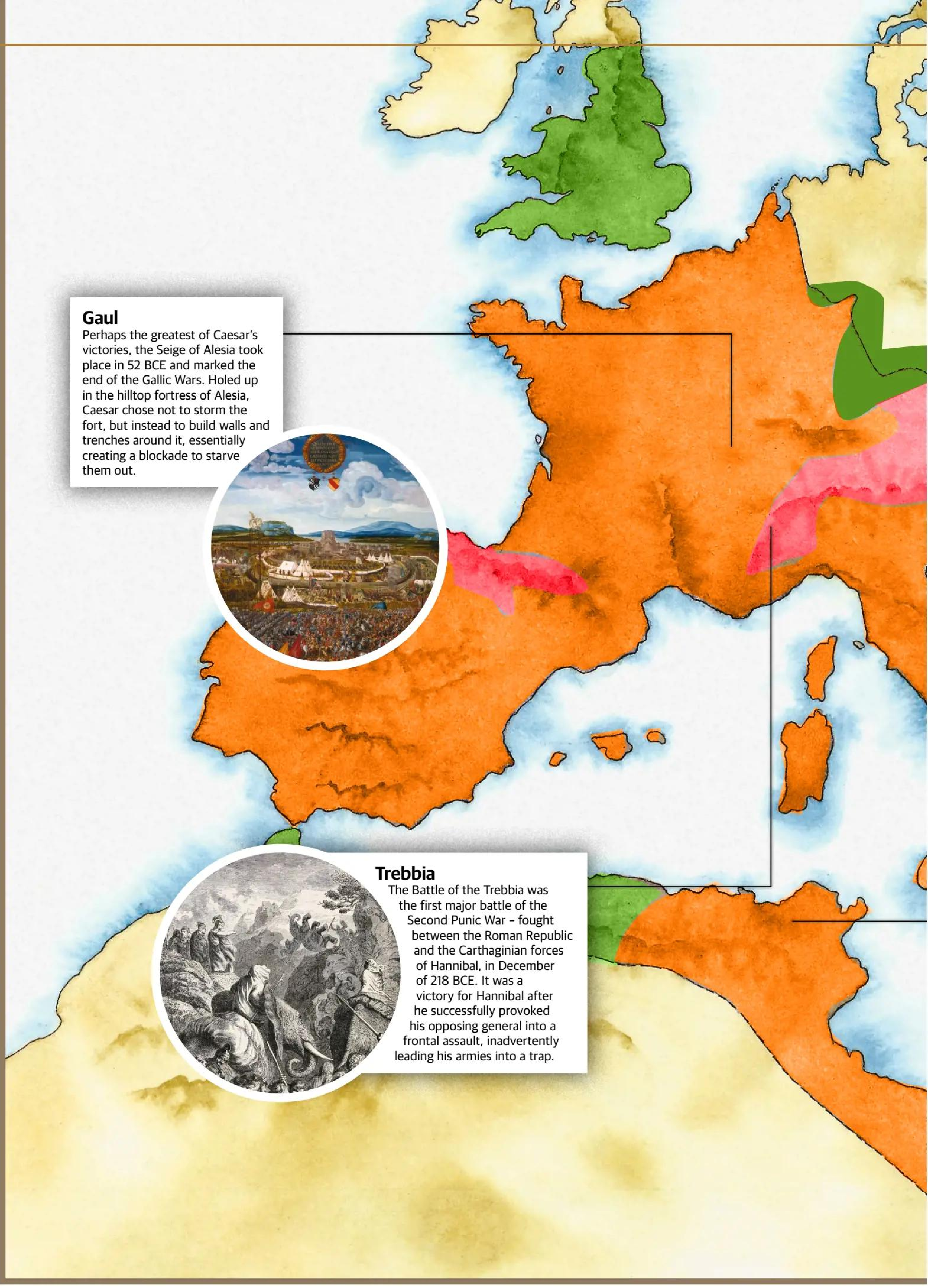
How Rome came, saw and conquered: the rundown of all the territories Rome gained over time

5TH CENTURY BCE	ITALIAN PENINSULA
4TH CENTURY BCE	SUDAN
4TH CENTURY BCE	TUNISIA
4TH CENTURY BCE	MOROCCO
4TH CENTURY BCE	SOUTHERN FRANCE
4TH CENTURY BCE	SPAIN
1ST CENTURY BCE	NORTHERN FRANCE
1ST CENTURY BCE	GREECE
1ST CENTURY BCE	TURKEY
1ST CENTURY BCE	EGYPT
1ST CENTURY CE	BRITANNIA
2ND CENTURY CE	DACIA (ROMANIA)
2ND CENTURY CE	ARMENIA
2ND CENTURY CE	THRACE (BULGARIA)

🟧 *Roman Republic territories up to the death of Caesar (44 BCE)*

🟥 *Additional Roman Empire territories up to the death of Augustus (14 CE)*

🟩 *Additional Roman Empire territories up to the death of Trajan (117 CE)*



Gaul
Perhaps the greatest of Caesar's victories, the Seige of Alesia took place in 52 BCE and marked the end of the Gallic Wars. Holed up in the hilltop fortress of Alesia, Caesar chose not to storm the fort, but instead to build walls and trenches around it, essentially creating a blockade to starve them out.

Trebbia
The Battle of the Trebbia was the first major battle of the Second Punic War – fought between the Roman Republic and the Carthaginian forces of Hannibal, in December of 218 BCE. It was a victory for Hannibal after he successfully provoked his opposing general into a frontal assault, inadvertently leading his armies into a trap.

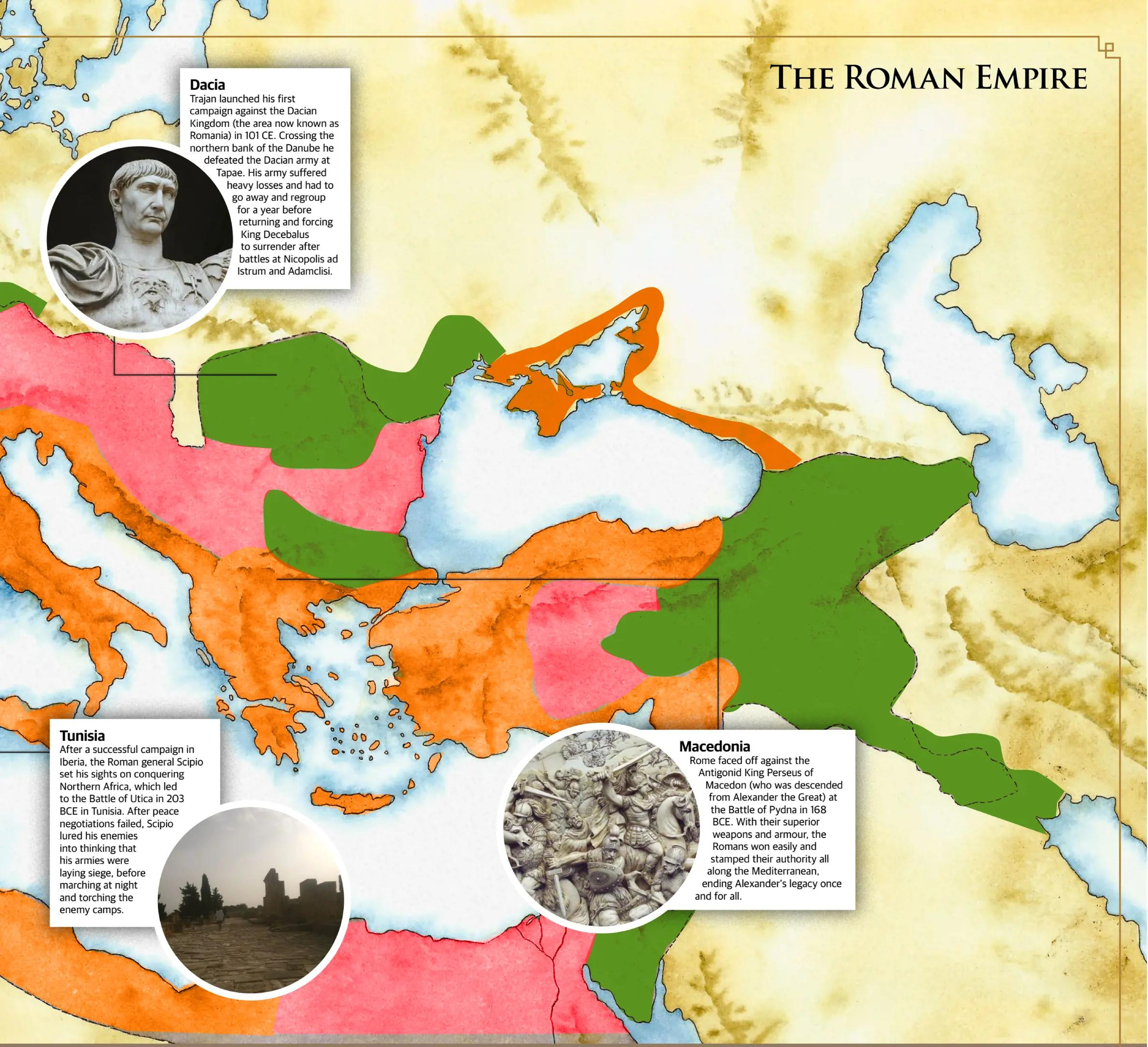
his decisions accordingly. When his political opponents in the Senate wanted to prosecute him, he naturally refused to relinquish his military command and instead led his legions in an invasion of Italy. Caesar was victorious over the Senatorial faction that opposed him, and though he never made himself king, he ruled as a dictator until his assassination in March 44 BCE.

Civil war came to Rome once more. After years of brutal struggle, Caesar's grandnephew and adoptive son and heir, Octavian, triumphed over Mark Antony and his lover, the Egyptian queen, Cleopatra. The Republic was his, but it was exhausted by war, and Octavian, who now took the title Augustus, or 'eminent one', began to reorganise it so as to heal its many hurts. He went about this in a clever manner, always seeking to cloak the true extent of his immense political power behind a facade of Republican propriety. Augustus paid the senators – eager for peace and quiet after years of civil war – much courtesy and allowed them to partake in imperial governance by governing many provinces. However, he kept the most important provinces and military commands in his own hands.

One of the titles he took for himself, hailing from the time of the Republic, was imperator, meaning 'commander'. This word was used by legionaries to salute a victorious general, and it reflected Augustus' control of the army. It is from imperator that the modern English word 'emperor' descends. Though Rome had long maintained an empire, dating back to the third century BCE, it is only with the accession of Augustus in 27 BCE that modern historians mark the start of the 'Roman Empire'. Augustus, however, claimed only to be the princeps, the first man in Rome, not a royal monarch. The early empire is often called the 'Principate' for this reason.

At its height, the empire would embrace between 70 and 90 million people, most of whom were non-Italians. The security of the empire was upheld by its well-drilled legions, which were distributed around the periphery of the empire by Augustus. For his own protection he created the Praetorian Guard. Imperial borders were defended by about 150,000 legionaries and an equivalent number of non-citizen auxiliary troops.

THE ROMAN EMPIRE



Dacia
Trajan launched his first campaign against the Dacian Kingdom (the area now known as Romania) in 101 CE. Crossing the northern bank of the Danube he defeated the Dacian army at Tapae. His army suffered heavy losses and had to go away and regroup for a year before returning and forcing King Decebalus to surrender after battles at Nicopolis ad Istrum and Adamclisi.

Tunisia
After a successful campaign in Iberia, the Roman general Scipio set his sights on conquering Northern Africa, which led to the Battle of Utica in 203 BCE in Tunisia. After peace negotiations failed, Scipio lured his enemies into thinking that his armies were laying siege, before marching at night and torching the enemy camps.

Macedonia
Rome faced off against the Antigonid King Perseus of Macedon (who was descended from Alexander the Great) at the Battle of Pydna in 168 BCE. With their superior weapons and armour, the Romans won easily and stamped their authority all along the Mediterranean, ending Alexander's legacy once and for all.

It was one of Augustus' great achievements that he was able to discharge so many of the troops who had fought in the gigantic armies of the civil wars of the late Republic. What Augustus did was always with an eye for improving the security and stability of the empire over which he presided. He was not interested in further conquest, for the empire was already tremendous; rather he wanted a peaceful state that was secure within its own sprawling borders.

The stability that Augustus' legions were able to enforce on the Roman world was comprehensive enough that the period that followed Augustus' coming to sole power in 27 BCE and lasting until the late 2nd century CE has become known as the Pax Romana, or 'Roman Peace'.

The Julio-Claudian emperors, named after the dynasty that Augustus founded, were something of a mixed bag. Augustus' effort to ensure a stable succession after he was gone was not easy. His first choices would have been his grandsons, Gaius and Lucius, but these both died young, with Augustus deeply saddened by his loss. With few good options, he made Tiberius, his stepson by his wife, Livia, his adoptive son and heir.

Tiberius would succeed Augustus in 14 CE. He was an unhappy man but a generally effective ruler. The Praetorians, who had hitherto been wholly loyal to Augustus, would prove to be troublesome, and their meddling in the imperial succession, made possible by their close proximity to the throne, would bode ill for the future of the empire. His successor, Caligula, was greeted with much enthusiasm when he took the throne, but the young man soon showed himself to be mentally unstable and he was assassinated by his own Praetorians in 41 CE.

The Praetorians then chose Claudius, who ruled well until 54 CE, when he was followed by his stepson, Nero. As a Hellenophile, Nero was infatuated with the arts and was an enthusiastic singer, musician and actor, paying little heed to anything else. There were serious revolts in both Britain and Judaea during his reign, and he was also blamed for the outbreak of a massive fire in the city of Rome in 64 that he then tried to blame on the Christians, adherents of a relatively new religious sect that had established itself in Rome.

Civil war would ever be the bane of Rome. One of the most dramatic and terrifying was that of 69 CE, the Year of the Four Emperors. Nero was deeply unpopular and the end of his reign was riven by revolts and conspiracies against him. The Praetorian Guard had become disenchanted with him and picked another man, Galba, to be his replacement. When Galba was confirmed by the Senate, Nero committed suicide. The Julio-Claudian dynasty founded by Augustus a century before had come to an end.

Galba did not last long. His penny-pinching and cruelty alienated many of his supporters and unhappy Praetorians murdered him after a reign of just six months. His successor, Otho, was defeated by Vitellius and he committed suicide after a reign of only three months. Then legions under the command of generals loyal to Vespasian, the commander of Rome's eastern legions, defeated Vitellius' legions in battle in Italy and Vitellius was slain. Vespasian, who had stayed in the East, was recognised as Rome's new emperor, founding his own dynasty.

Rome recovered from the turmoil that attended Nero's demise. Vespasian, his son Titus and his younger son Domitian, together forming the Flavians, were capable rulers and they ushered in a century of overall peace and stability for Rome. Domitian was unpopular, and with death there came a succession of much better-liked rulers who were as a group called the 'Good Emperors'. The first was Nerva, who adopted as his son and heir the grown warrior-emperor Trajan, who in his turn adopted Hadrian, who adopted Antoninus Pius, who adopted the philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius.

The adoption of a capable adult man as heir was a beneficial method to ensure an orderly succession and that the empire was entrusted to sure hands. This period was the golden age of Imperial Rome. It did not last. During the reign of Marcus Aurelius the first of the great barbarian invasions of Rome began. Marcus, a fundamentally contemplative and peaceful man, was compelled by circumstance to spend much of his reign in military encampments on the Danubian frontier fending off the invasions of the Germanic Marcomanni and Quadi peoples.

Marcus was largely successful in this, but his selection of his own biological son, Commodus, as his heir was not a good one. Commodus was more interested in fighting in the arena as a gladiator than in ruling the empire. He was assassinated in 192. The Praetorian Guard, arrogant and greedy, then auctioned off the throne to the highest bidder. Commodus' death brought a return to civil war that only came to an end in 193 with the triumph of Septimius Severus, commander of the Danubian legions, over his rival generals, Pescennius Niger and Clodius Albinus.

Severus brought security to the empire, but he was also a realist. He told his sons and successors of the 'Severan' dynasty, Caracalla and Geta, to stick together, pay the soldiers and forget everything else. It was not bad advice, but it highlighted how Rome was, at root, a military monarchy, despite its very civilian trappings, and that control over the army was all-important for the maintenance of political power.

The building security problems on Rome's frontiers, seen first during the reign of Marcus Aurelius and suppressed or kept in check for so long, would burst their bounds after the 235 assassination of Alexander Severus, the last of the Severan dynasty founded by Septimius Severus. The catastrophe that ensued over the

BECOMING ROMANS

Many non-Roman peoples adopted Roman language and customs during the long centuries of imperial rule

The Romans were, broadly speaking, open to the inclusion of non-Romans into their state. They were certainly more willing to grant citizenship to foreigners than other famous civilisations of the ancient world, such as the Athenians, Spartans or Carthaginians. This helped to bring the non-Roman peoples of Italy into the Roman fold and weld them into one people.

Outside of Italy, many peoples, such as the Gauls and the Iberians, adopted the Latin language as their own. This is why languages such as French, Spanish and Portuguese, as well as Italian, all descended from Latin, and are together known as Romance languages.

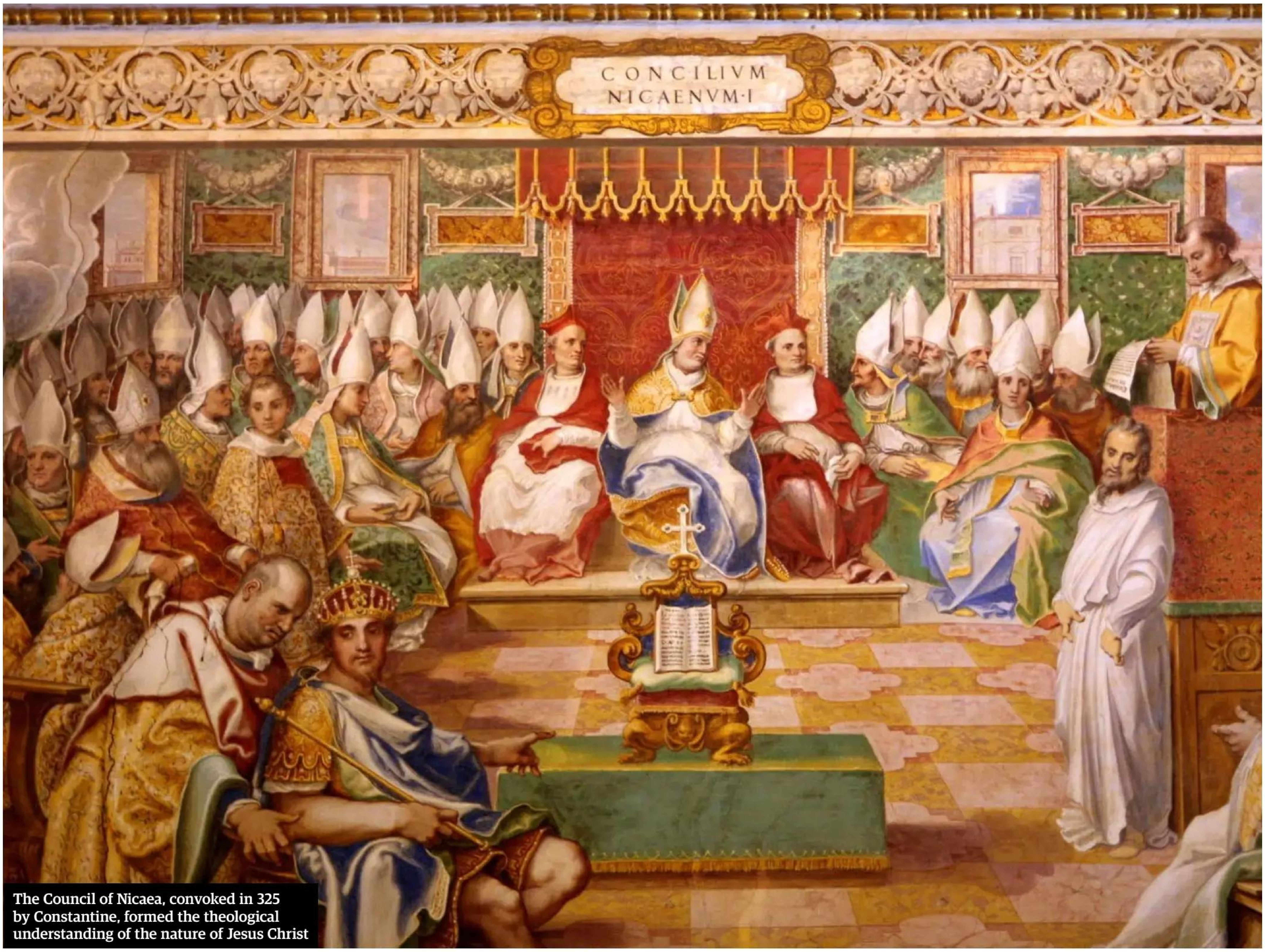
Romanisation across the empire more broadly was accelerated by the presence of Roman legions in their fortified camps that grew into cities, many of which still exist today. Certain fortunate provincials managed to acquire citizenship, largely through military service. Provincials were in time admitted into the Roman Senate, and emperors too were drawn from outside Italy, such as Trajan and Septimius Severus.

Emperor Caracalla made all the people of the empire into Roman citizens in 212 when he granted citizenship to all free inhabitants. It is said that this was not done out of generosity; rather Caracalla's prime motivation was to increase imperial revenue by increasing the number of citizens who were liable for the payment of certain taxes.

Whatever their ethnic origins, those who wanted to be considered Roman adopted the common Greco-Roman culture and values of the empire, which included the Greek and Latin languages and its art, literature and urban living.

Caracalla in his Constitutio Antoniniana made all free inhabitants of the empire Roman citizens

The construction of the famed Colosseum was started in 70 CE during the reign of Vespasian



The Council of Nicaea, convoked in 325 by Constantine, formed the theological understanding of the nature of Jesus Christ

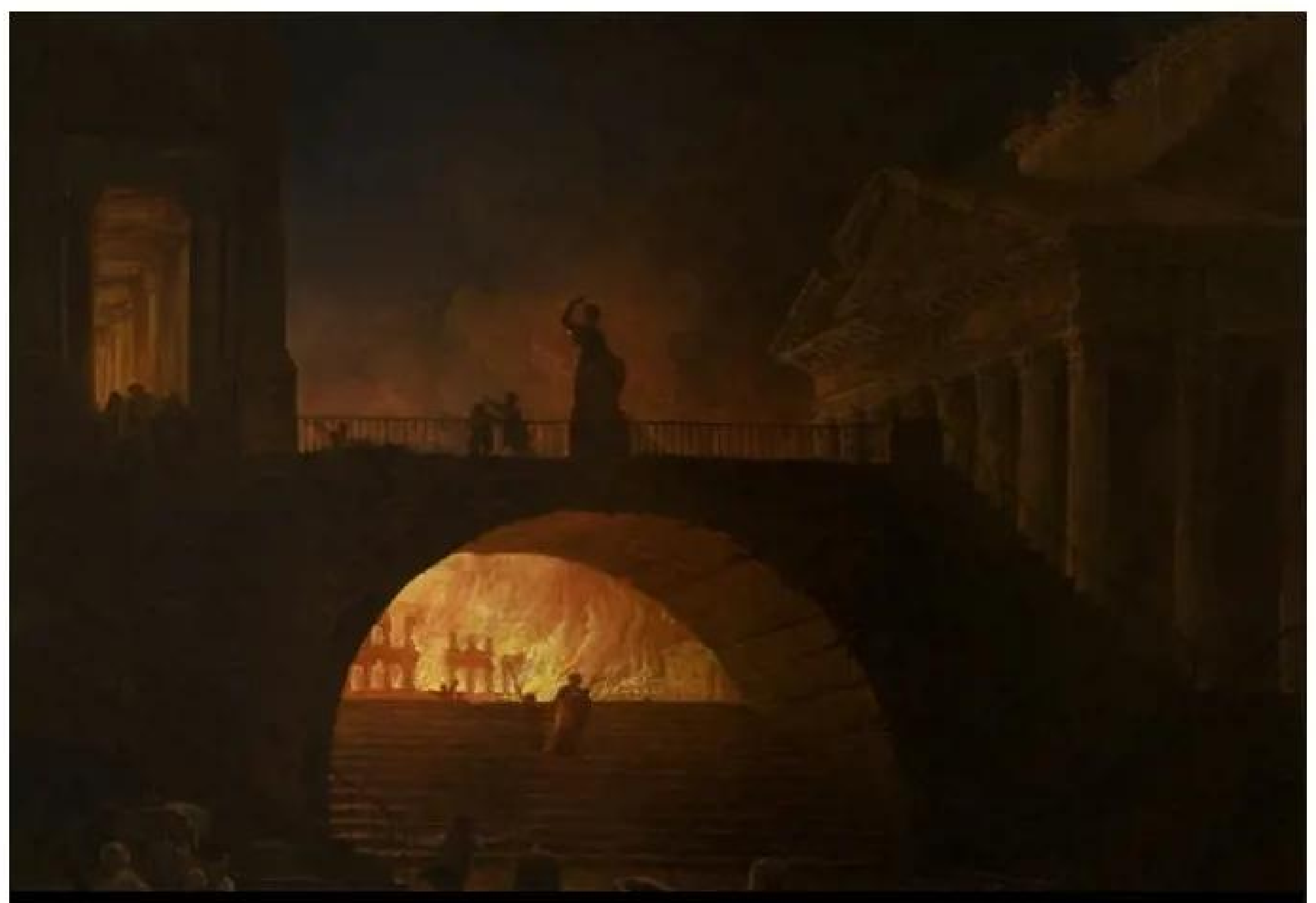
next half century (235–284) has become known as the 'Crisis of the Third Century'. The empire was beset by foreign invasions, internal rebellions and usurpations by ambitious generals. All of these weakened the empire, which threatened to fall apart on several occasions. Goths (Germanic barbarians from the steppes of modern southern Russia) marauded over the frontiers and burst upon the Mediterranean, raiding far and wide in their boats.

In the East, the weak Parthian Arsacid dynasty was replaced by the vigorous and aggressive Sassanids, with their homeland in Persia, who assumed control over the old Parthian empire. The Sassanids were better organised than their Parthian predecessors, and their kings led many invasions of Rome's eastern provinces. The grand city of Antioch was sacked in 253, and in an abject humiliation, a Roman emperor, Valerian, was taken captive in battle by the Persians in 260 at Edessa in modern Turkey.

The extreme pressures on the frontiers and the inability of Rome's central government caused some provinces to look to their own defence. Britain and Gaul were effectively independent for a time, as was Syria and much else of the Roman East, which was defended successfully by Queen Zenobia of Palmyra in modern Syria.

After decades of hard, seemingly interminable fighting and much bloodshed, the empire would be saved by capable soldier-emperors from its rougher but tougher Danubian provinces. These Illyrians, as they were called, took Rome's battered armies in hand, welded them into fighting shape and turned back the foreign assaults. The Senate, Rome's traditional source of legitimacy, was by this time a shadow of its former self; the Illyrian emperors largely bypassed it. Among them was Gallienus (who reigned from 253–268), the son of the captured Valerian. He won a huge victory over the Goths at Naissus in 268. The crisis began to fade decisively with the coming to power of Emperor Aurelian (ruler of Rome from 270–275). In 272 he defeated Zenobia and brought the wealthy eastern provinces back into the Roman fold. By 274, he had also reincorporated Gaul. To protect the city of Rome itself he built a 20-kilometre wall around it, which is still known as the 'Aurelian Wall'. Symptomatic of the political instability of this period, even this successful general was vulnerable, eventually assassinated by other officers in 275.

An end to the chaos of the invasions and civil wars of the third century came only with the rise to power in 284 of Diocletian. Another tough Illyrian soldier-emperor, he would rule for over two decades, an unprecedentedly lengthy reign in this deadly era of upheaval. Along with his great friend and partner, Maximian, whom he made co-Augustus alongside him, Diocletian restored security to Rome's far-flung frontiers and steadily brought to heel the remaining breakaway provinces of the empire.



Nero is said to have started the Great Fire that burned Rome, which he then blamed on the Christians

To forestall further rebellions by military men with soldiers at their disposal, Diocletian instituted the Tetrarchy, or rule by four. Each of the two senior Augusti, in this case Diocletian and Maximian, would rule one half of the empire, east or west. Each man would also select a junior partner, or Caesar, to be his designated successor. With the Tetrarchy there would be four men sharing the imperial authority, each able to be on the spot to deal with a crisis. Designating successors in the form of the two Caesars was meant to dissuade other generals from getting the idea that they could raise the standard of revolt and be named Augustus themselves.

Diocletian was being optimistic and did not foresee how much the Tetrarchical system would depend on his own force of personality to work as intended once he was gone from the scene. To make his position and those of his co-rulers more secure, Diocletian and his co-rulers adopted splendid dress and elaborate court ritual similar to what eastern monarchs practised. This new, grander style was a significant step away from traditional Roman practice, and the autocratic style of imperial government has led historians to aptly refer to this period of the later Roman Empire as the 'Dominate'.

Diocletian and Maximian, having set Rome on what they thought was a firm footing, both abdicated together in 305. The Tetrarchy soon foundered without their stabilising presence. Constantine, the son of the former Augustus Constantius Chlorus, who had died in 306, was declared Augustus himself by his troops,and later came into conflict with Maxentius, the son of Maximian, over the control of the Western Empire. In 312, Constantine defeated Maxentius at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge outside Rome.

Constantine attributed his startling victory to the Christian god. In 313 he promulgated the Edict of Milan, which legalised Christianity, only recently a severely persecuted religion. Constantine showed the Christians enormous favour, building many grand churches. He wanted to unite the empire religiously, and his chosen religion for this was Christianity.

By 324 he had defeated Licinius, the eastern Augustus, and was the sole ruler of the whole of the Roman Empire. That same year he founded a new imperial capital on the site of Byzantium, an ancient city on the Bosporus. It would come to bear his name: Constantinople.

In 325 he convened a great Church council in the city of Nicaea over which he presided with the aim of coming to an agreement on matters of theology. The Council of Nicaea delivered a standard formula on the nature of Jesus Christ, a matter that had split the Christian Church for many years.

After his death in 337, Constantine's successors fell into conflict, just as had happened after

THE UNPEACEFUL PAX ROMANA

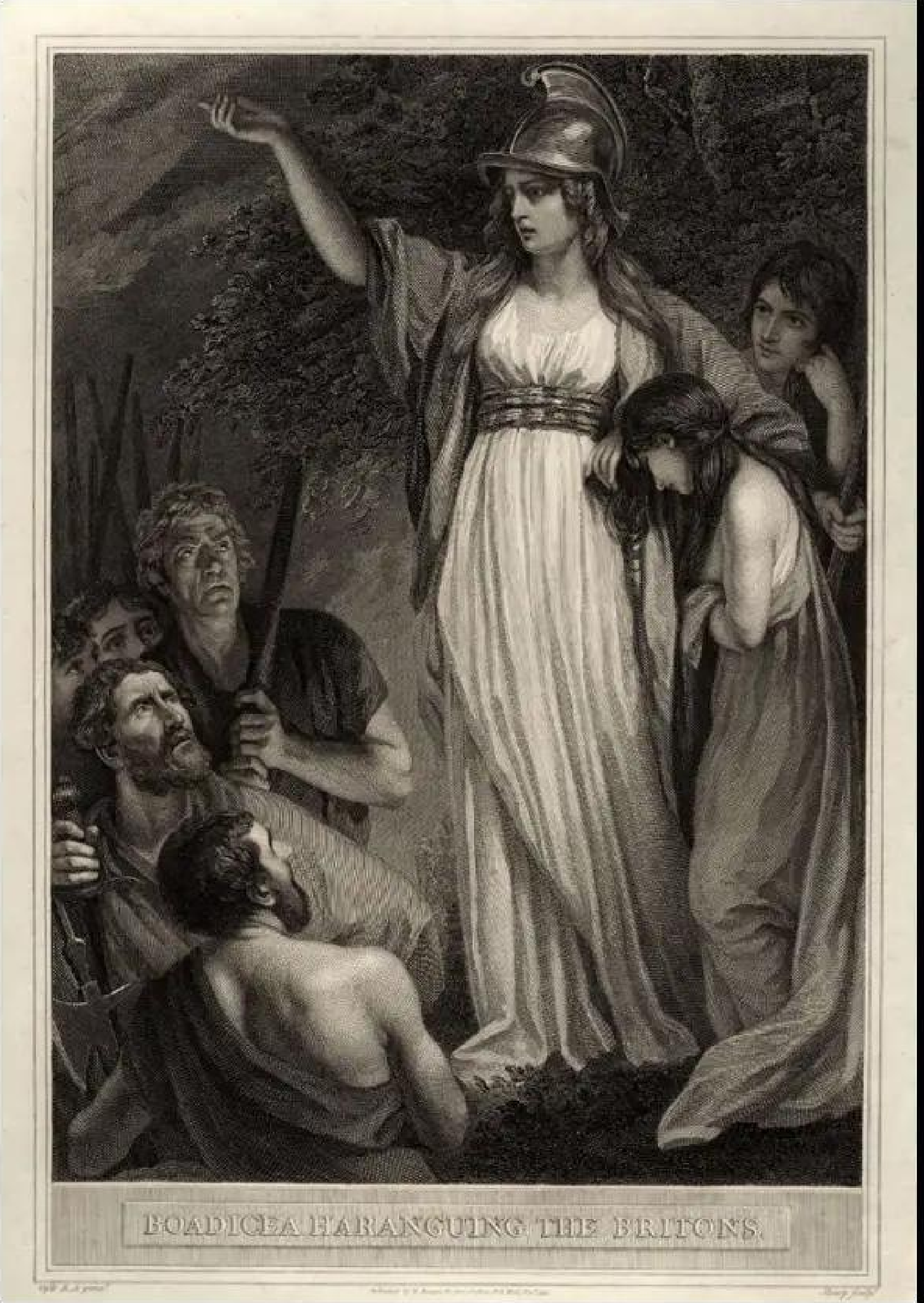
The Roman Peace was less pacific than is commonly thought

The famed Pax Romana, or 'Roman Peace', was not without its interruptions. There was a gigantic revolt in Pannonia in 6 CE that raged on for three bloody years and required the dispatch of many legions to stamp out.

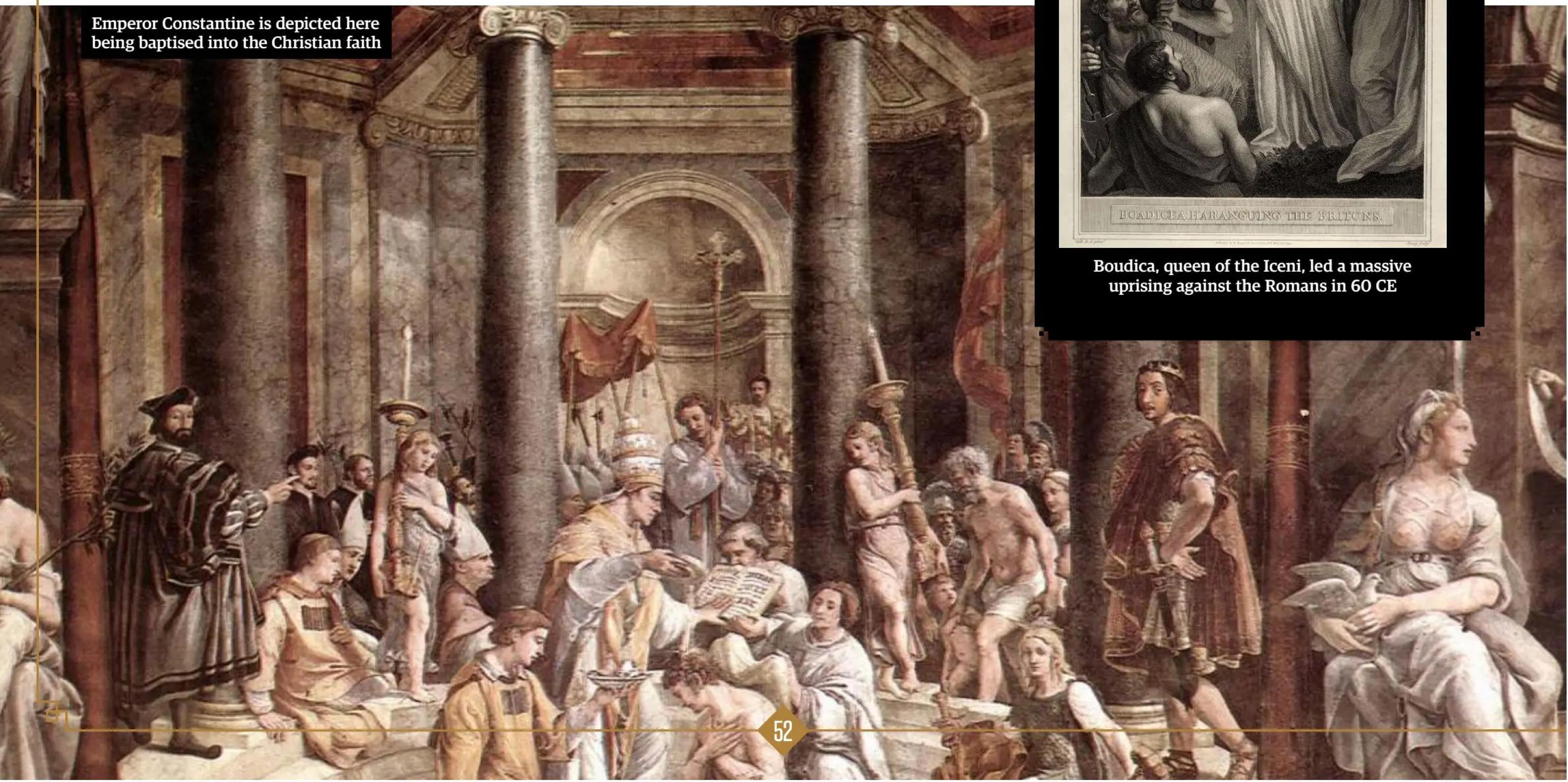
In 9 CE, three entire legions were ambushed and wiped out by German tribesmen in the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest in northern Germany. Much fighting on the eastern side of the Rhine was required to punish the Germans in the following years. The ferocious Batavians revolted in 69 and their rebellion was put down only with great difficulty. Likewise, in 60 CE the Britons revolted against Roman rule under the leadership of their warrior-queen Boudica of the Iceni.

In Judaea the Jews also revolted twice against Roman authority, in 66 and 132 respectively. Jerusalem was sacked by the legions in 70 and the Temple was destroyed. After the second rebellion of 132-135 failed, the Jews were dispersed across the empire.

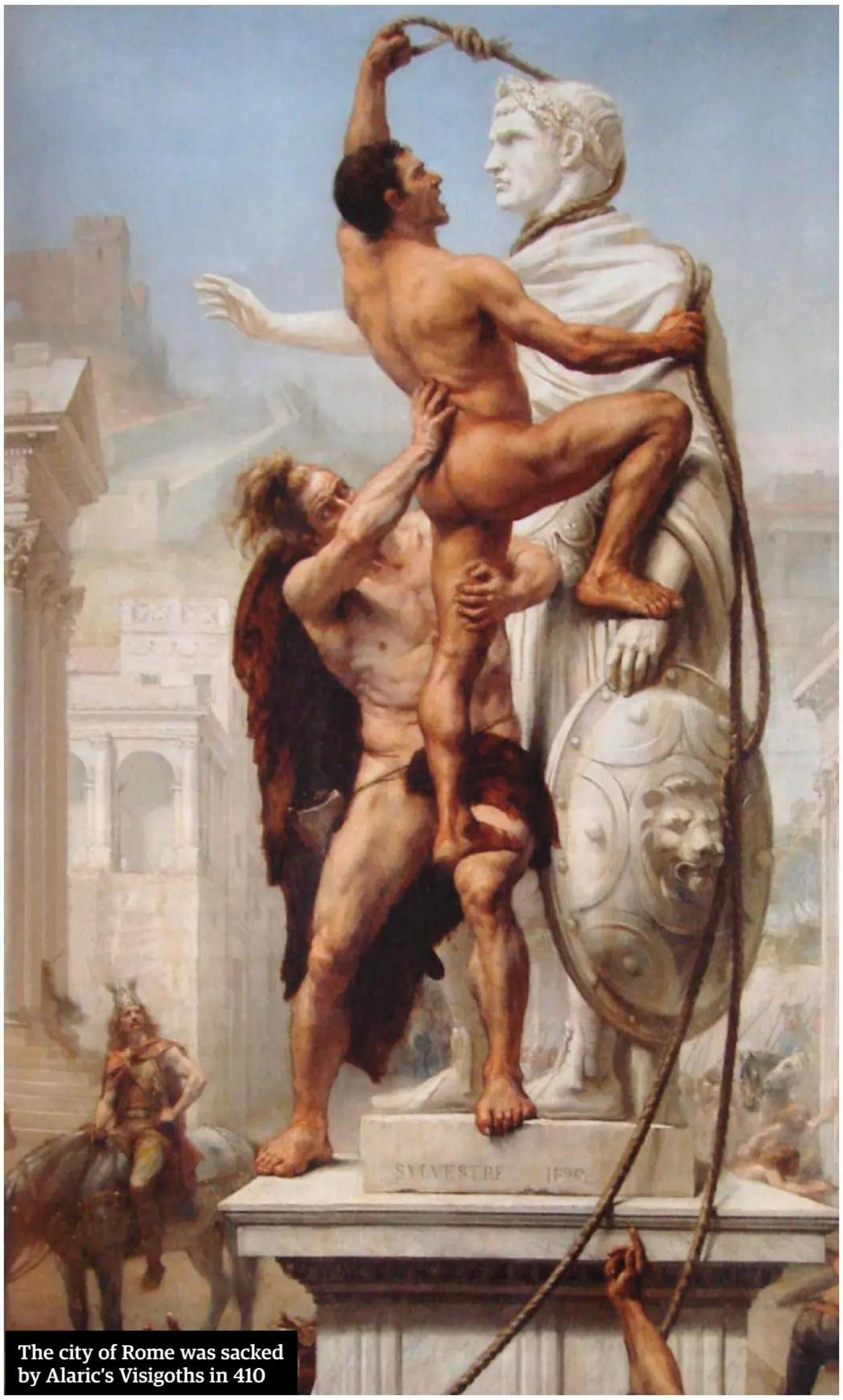
In the East there were wars with the empire of Parthia, centred on Iran. The main point of contention was the kingdom of Armenia, which adjoined both empires. Parthia itself was invaded by Emperor Trajan in 115 and its capital Ctesiphon on the Tigris River in distant Mesopotamia was sacked.


BOADICEA HARANGUING THE BRITONS.

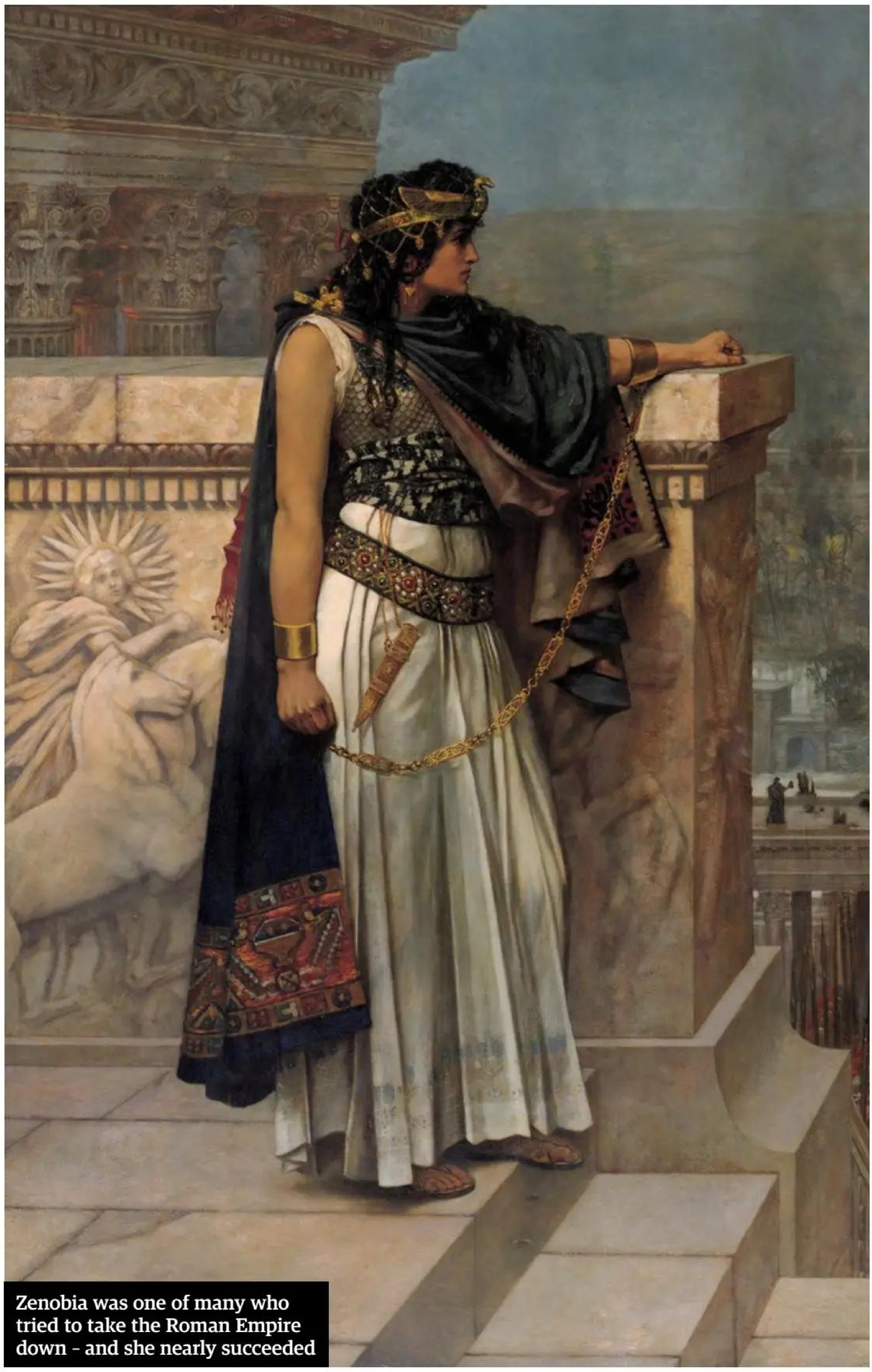
Boudica, queen of the Iceni, led a massive uprising against the Romans in 60 CE



Emperor Constantine is depicted here being baptised into the Christian faith



The city of Rome was sacked by Alaric's Visigoths in 410



Zenobia was one of many who tried to take the Roman Empire down – and she nearly succeeded

Diocletian and Maximian's abdications. Most notable of these was Julian, who was called the Apostate for his attempt to suppress Christianity and restore the ancient pagan religion of the empire. He died in battle fighting the Sassanid Persians, and his revisionist religious project came to nothing.

Rome's borders were still under unending pressure from the barbarians, particularly the Germanic peoples living east of the Rhine River and north and east of the Danube River. In 378 a Roman army was utterly annihilated (losses are estimated at between 10,000 and 20,000 men) by the Goths of Germany and the Alans of Iran at the Battle of Adrianople in the Balkans. Emperor Theodosius restored order to the empire, but it was precarious. Roman losses in the fighting had been so great that he had to rely ever more heavily on barbarian troops.

Worryingly, these barbarian soldiers, mainly Germans, were now being brought into their army under their own native commanders and not subjected to Roman discipline or training. They had a tendency to rebel when things were not to their liking. Yet the Romans were unable to find enough native troops to fill their armies and could not do without the Germans. Theodosius, who made Christianity the official religion of Rome, would be the last emperor to rule over a united empire, east and west. In the early 5th century, Franks and Visigoths crossed the Rhine River into Gaul; Visigoths and Vandals migrated to Spain, and the Vandals then invaded North Africa, leaving a bloody trail of death and destruction in their wake as they marauded across the continent.

One Gothic general, Alaric, a former officer of Theodosius, sacked Rome in 410. The Western Empire was enfeebled by barbarian invasions, the loss of territory and with it, tax revenue, and a general unwillingness on the part of the Eastern Empire to help it. The city of Rome was sacked again in 455 by Vandals sailing from North Africa.

The outlook of the Western Empire would darken further as it was nearly overrun by Attila and his Huns. Only a great victory at the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains in 451, largely attributable to barbarian soldiers, saved the Western Empire. After this, a succession of shadowy emperors dominated by their Germanic warlords would come and go. The last emperor in the West, Romulus Augustulus, would be deposed by his warlord, Odoacer, in 476. The Roman Empire in the West was gone forever. The Eastern Empire, controlling wealthier territories and with its capital of Constantinople largely secure behind lofty walls, would survive for 1,000 years until it was conquered by the Ottomans in 1453.

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THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

Uncover the extraordinary rise and fall of one of the world's greatest empires as it buckled under the weight of internal conflict and foreign invasions

BYZANTIUM IS BORN

Greek colonists founded a city on the European side of the Bosporus Strait. Strategically placed between Europe and Asia Minor, Byzantium prospered, though the Greeks and Persians warred over it many times.

657 BCE

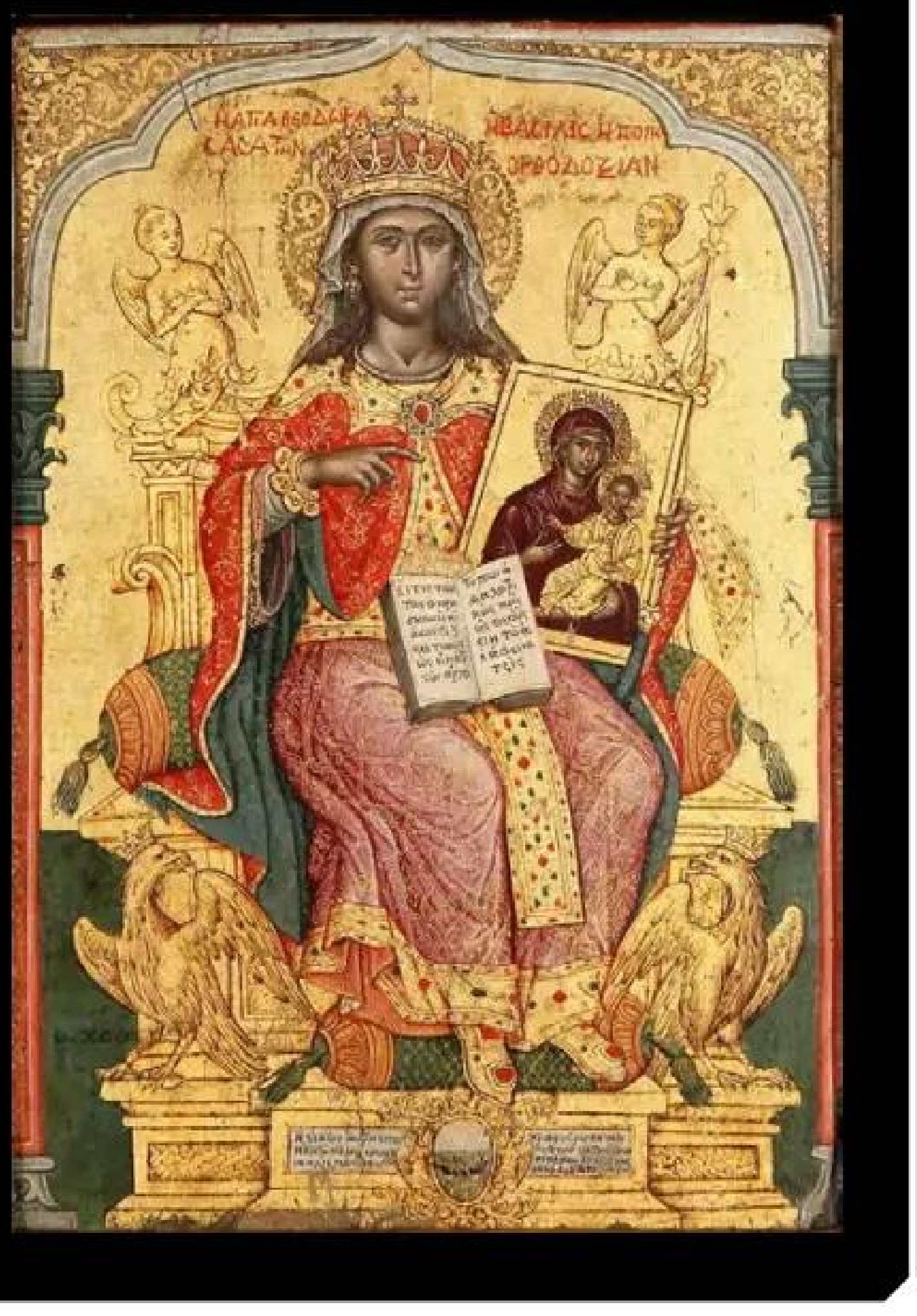
NEW ROME

Emperor Constantine the Great moved the capital of the Roman Empire to Byzantium to better manage its eastern frontiers. Endowed by his name, the new capital was rechristened Constantinople.

330 CE

RESTORATION OF ICONS

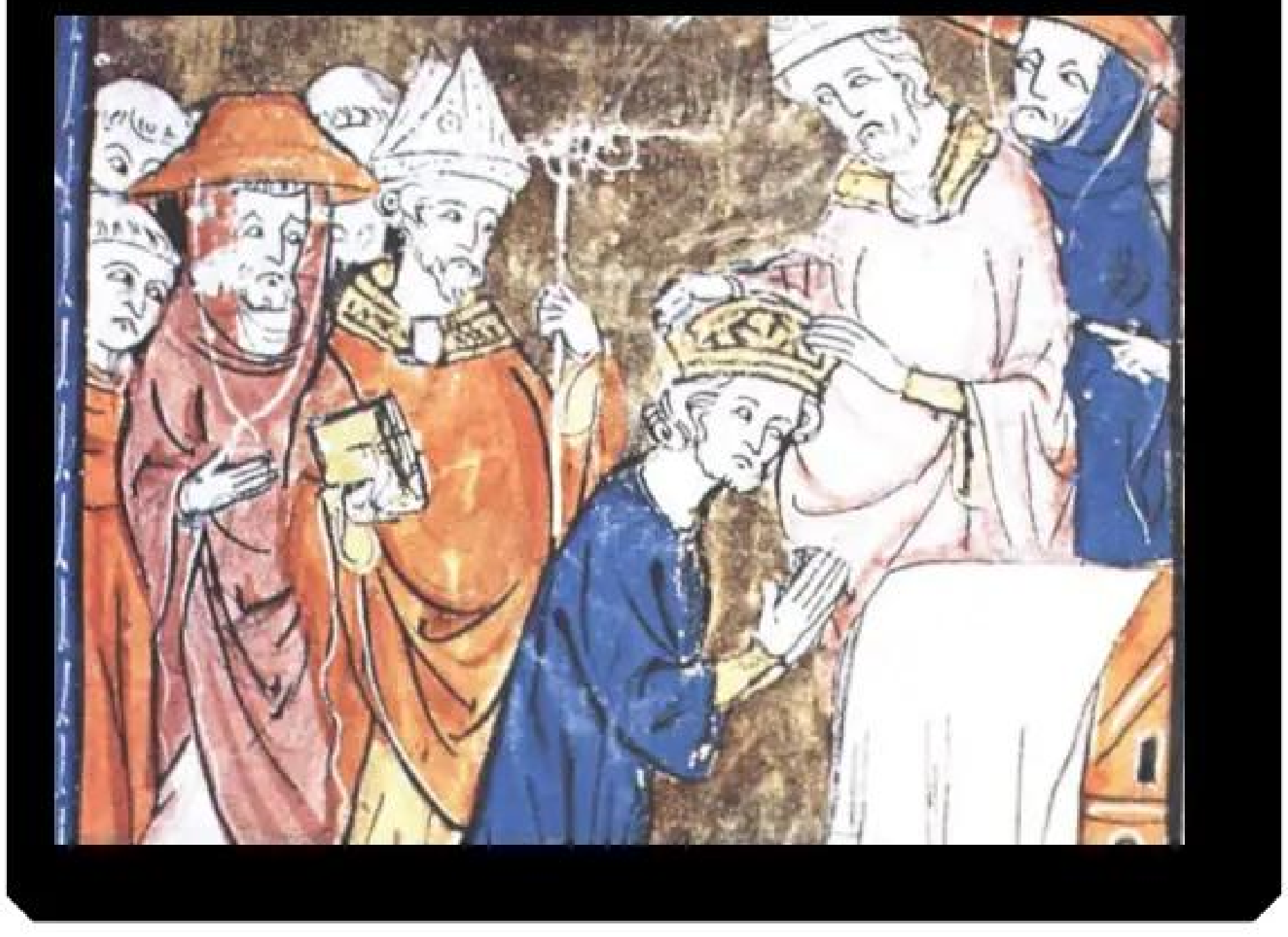
After another period of iconoclasm took hold in 814, Empress Theodora, regent for her son Michael III, finally ended the practice. Her efforts led to her canonisation as a saint.



843

HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

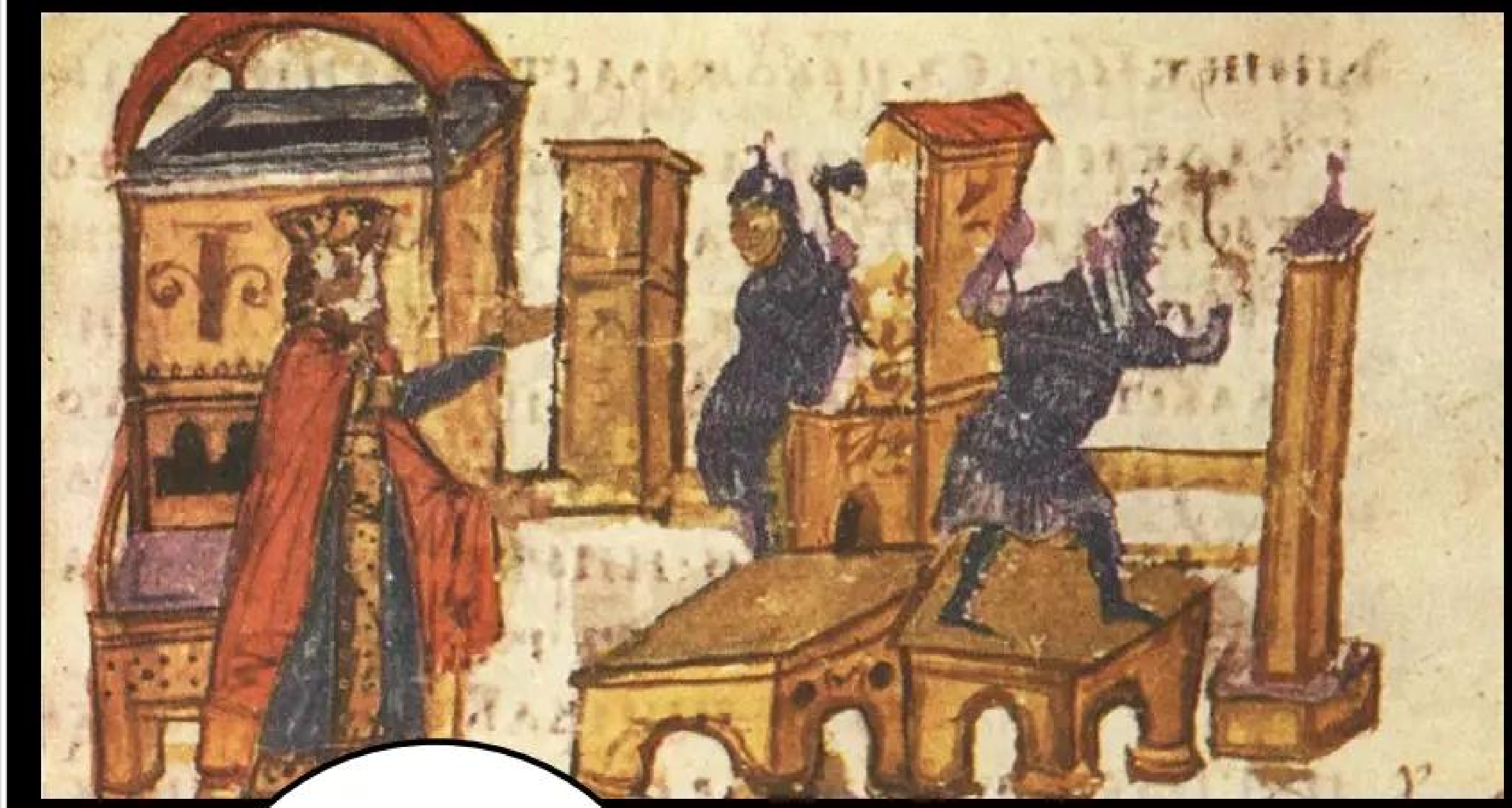
Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne as Holy Roman emperor in an attempt to restore the Western Roman Empire. It frustrated the East, who felt that their power was being threatened.



800

RISE OF ICONOCLASM

Emperor Leo III made the veneration of religious icons illegal across the empire, something that continued after his death. This vexed the Western Church, which supported their use.

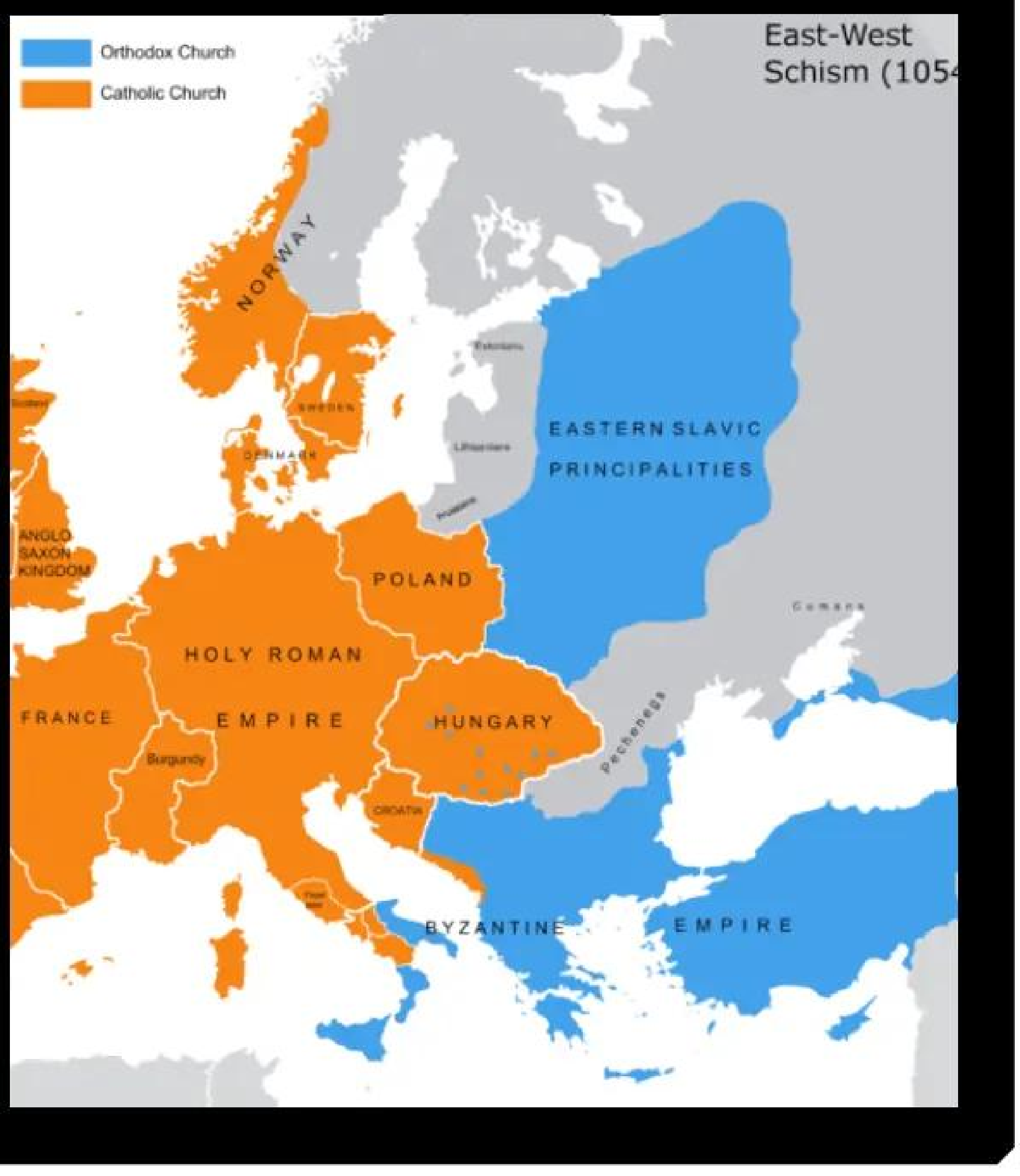


726-87

The period between iconoclasm and the sack of Constantinople was a high point for Byzantine art

THE GREAT SCHISM

After years of disputes, the Church formally separated into the Roman Catholic Church in the West, led by Pope Leo IX, and the Greek Orthodox Church, which was based in Constantinople.


Orthodox Church
Catholic Church
East-West Schism (1054
NORWAY
SWEDEN
DENMARK
ANGLO SAXON KINGDOM
EASTERN SLAVIC PRINCIPALITIES
POLAND
HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE
FRANCE
Burgundy
HUNGARY
CROATIA
Pechenegs
Cumans
BYZANTINE EMPIRE

1054

SACK OF CONSTANTINOPLE

After the Fourth Crusade helped put exiled Emperor Alexios IV on the throne, the Byzantines refused to pay. Angered, the Crusaders conquered the capital and established a new Latin Empire.

1204

PLUNDERING AWAY

20,000 men fought in the Crusader army

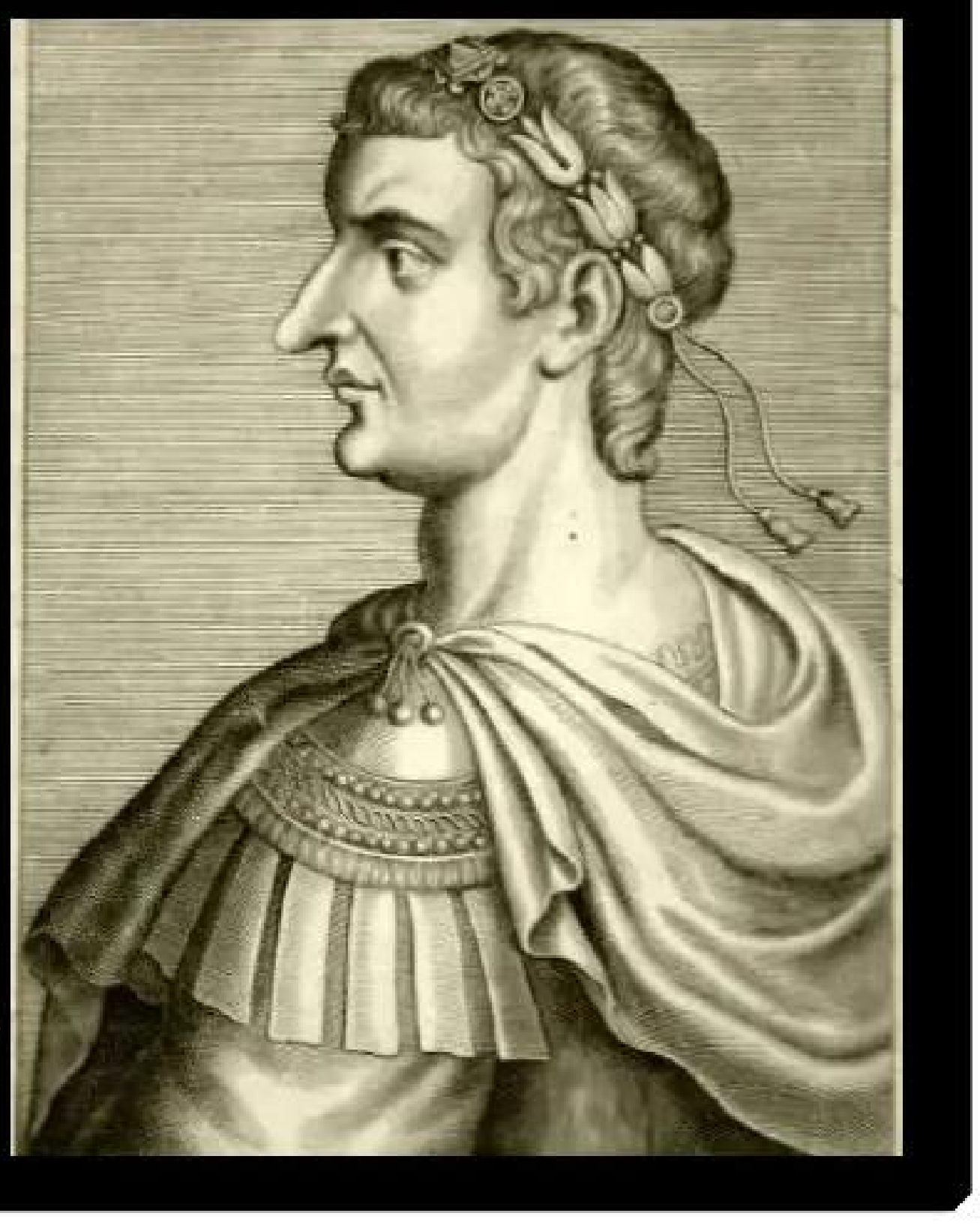
Number of ships used in the sacking **200**

57 Number of years the Latin Empire survived

1204

Modern historians use the name 'Byzantine Empire', but the citizens identified themselves as Romans

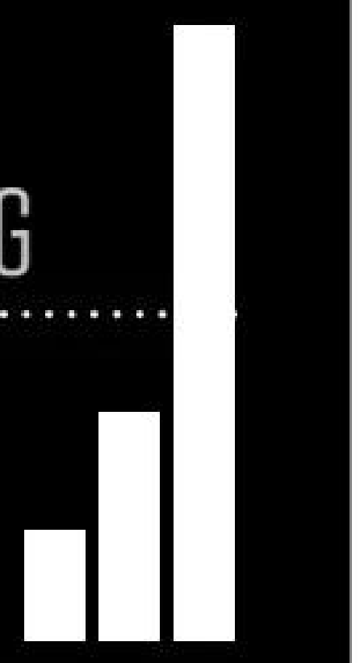
A PERMANENT SPLIT



Upon the death of Emperor Theodosius I, his two sons, Arcadius and Honorius, inherited the Eastern and the Western halves of the Roman Empire respectively. The empire would never be reunited.

395 CE

PAYING THE HUNS



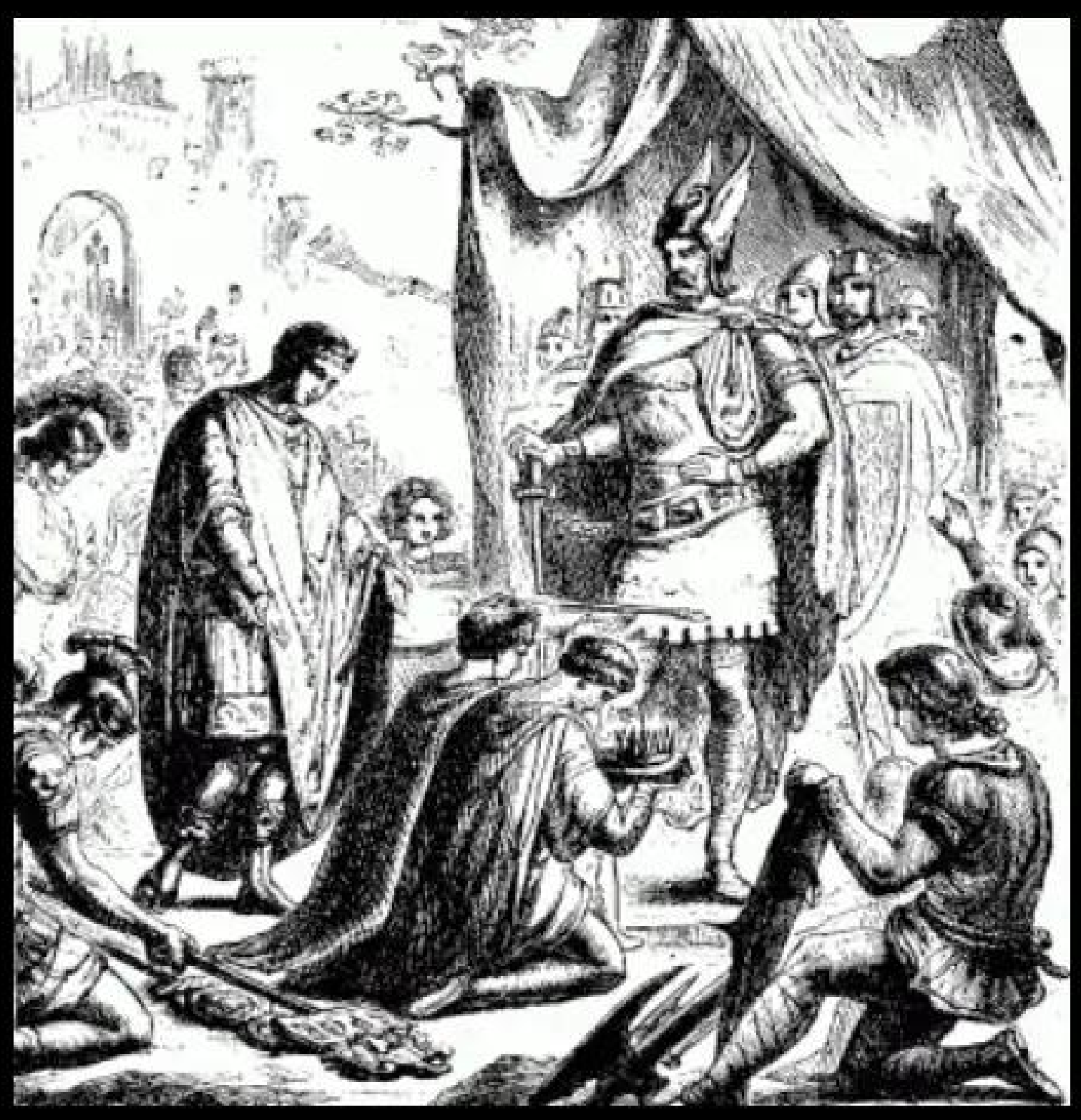
Amount of gold the Byzantines paid the Huns annually to keep them at bay 159KG

318KG The tribute had doubled by 433 as Attila rose to power

The amount trebled in 443 after the empire was heavily defeated by the Huns 952KG

424-43 CE

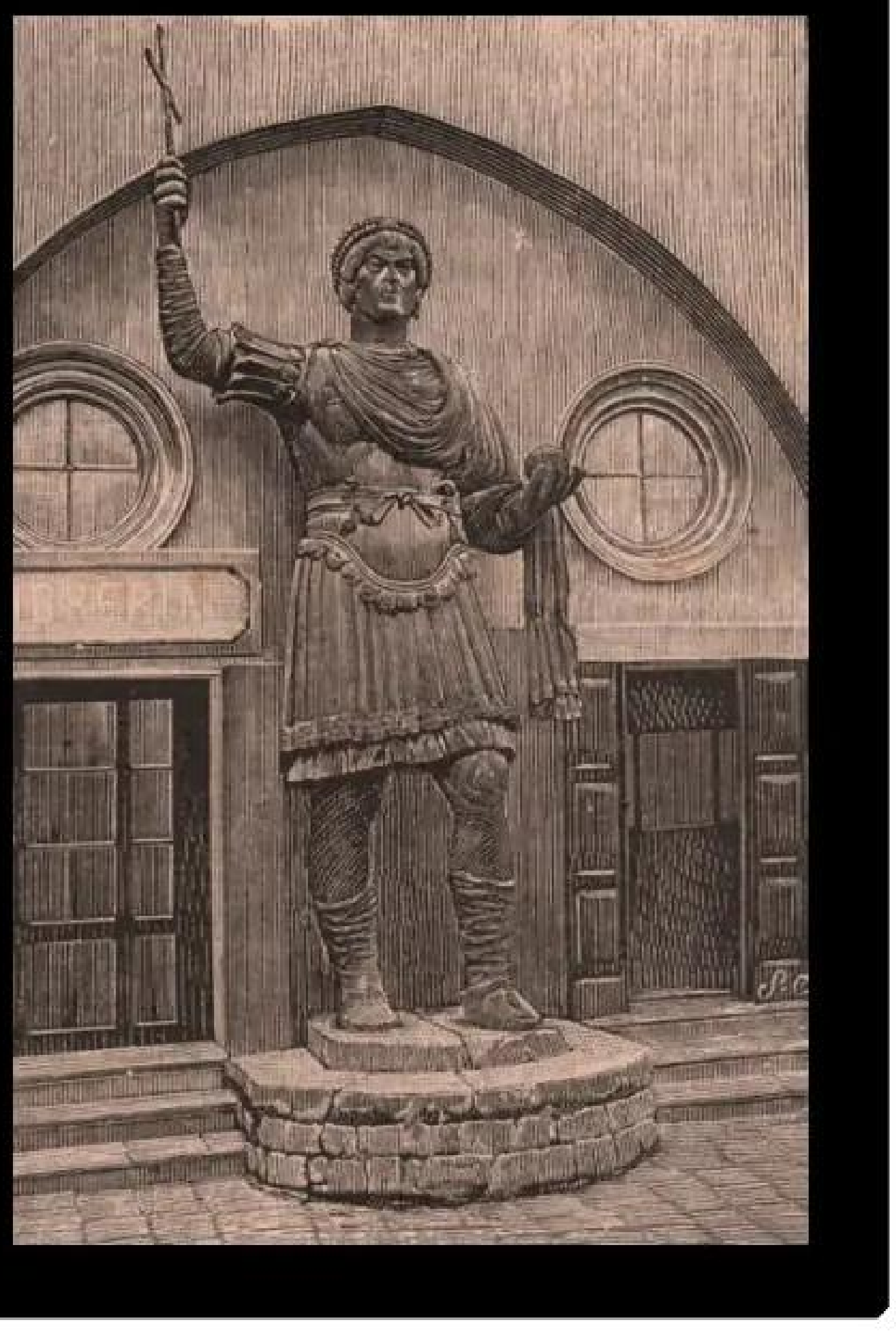
THE WEST FALLS



The overthrow of Romulus Augustus by the barbarian Odoacer marked the end of Western Roman Empire. However, Odoacer bent the knee to Constantinople and Eastern Rome endured for another 1,000 years.

476 CE

IT'S ALL GREEK TO ME!



Emperor Heraclius introduced Greek as the official language of the empire's administration. By the next generation, knowledge of Latin was rare, even among the educated.

620

THE JUSTINIAN PLAGUE

25-50 MILLION people died across the empire

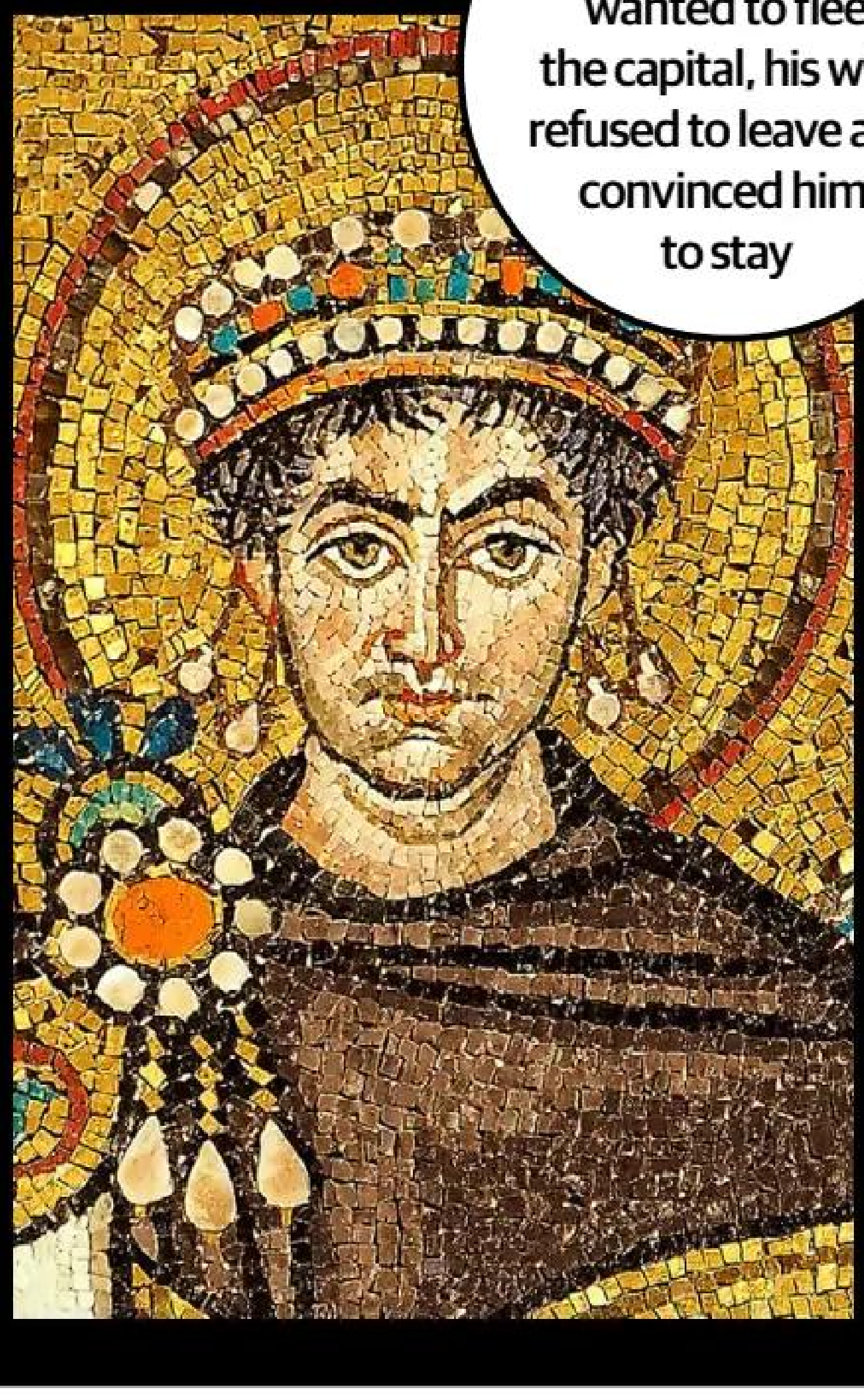
10,000 people died every day in Constantinople

3 outbreaks of bubonic plague happened, wwith this being the first, followed by the Black Death and the Third Pandemic

541-42

THE NIKA RIOTS

Justinian I's harsh treatment of hooligans at a chariot race, as well as anger at a recent tax hike, sparked five days of rioting that killed a tenth of Constantinople.



While Justinian wanted to flee the capital, his wife refused to leave and convinced him to stay

532

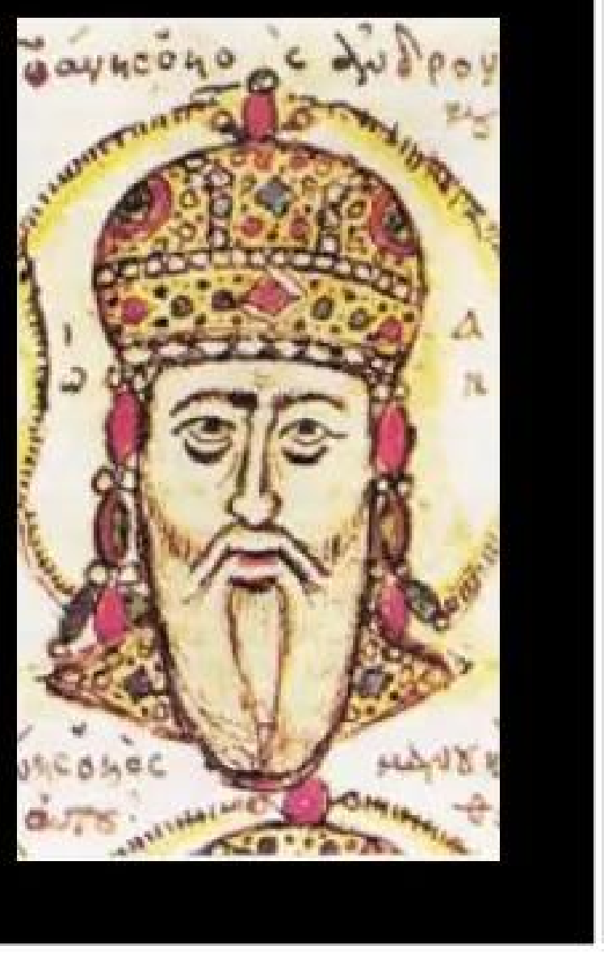
RESTORED TO POWER

Emperor Michael VIII successfully recaptured Constantinople and caused the Latin Emperor, Baldwin II, to flee the city. Michael restored the capital, which had fallen into disrepair, back to its former grandeur.

1261

INTERNAL STRIFE

A series of civil wars among dynastic rivals during the reign of Emperor John V severely weakened the empire and left it vulnerable to attacks from enemies abroad.

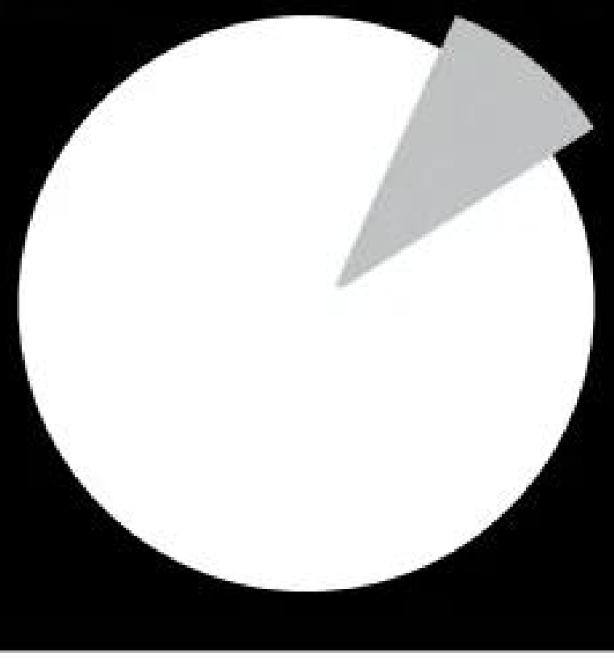


1321-79

POPULATION OF CONSTANTINOPLE

400,000 people live in the city during the 6th century before the plague

70,000 people lived in the capital after its recapture during the 13th century

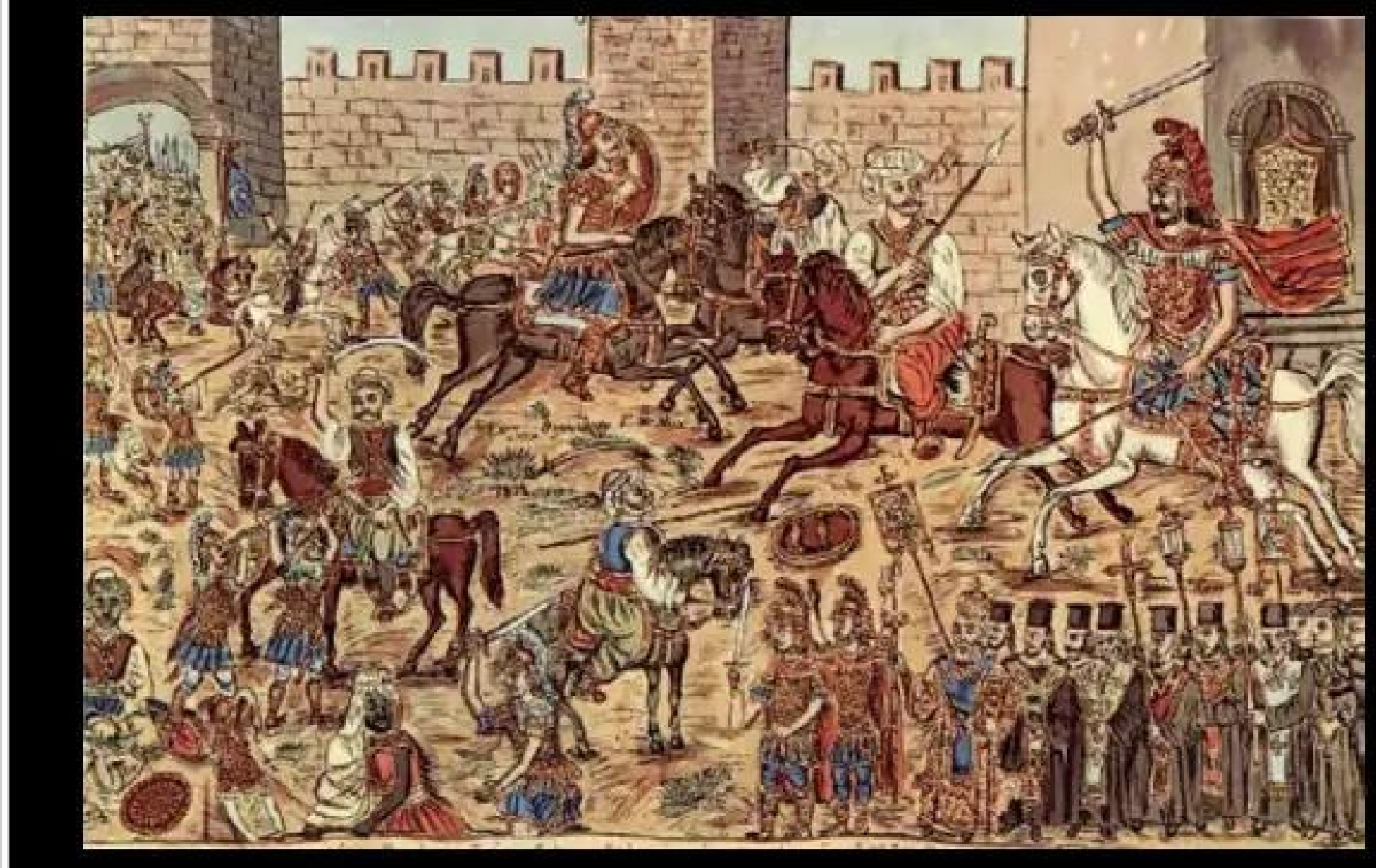


The population of the 15th century was just 10% of the size it was in the 6th

1400

END OF AN EMPIRE

The army of Sultan Mehmed II killed Emperor Constantine XI as the Ottoman Turks successfully captured the capital. The event marked the end of the Byzantine Empire.

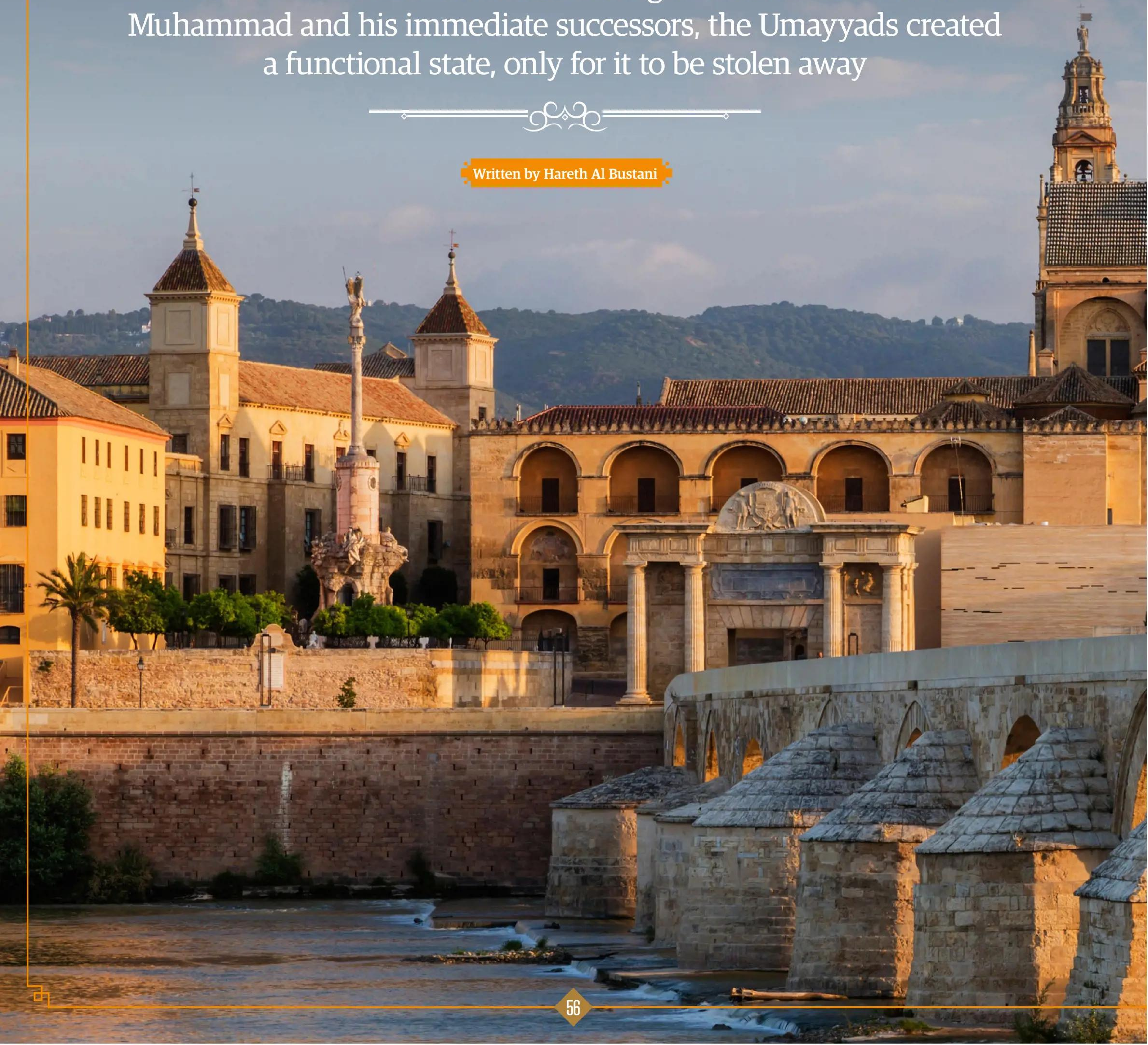


1453

THE UMAYYAD CALIPHATE

From the vast domain united during the remarkable life of Muhammad and his immediate successors, the Umayyads created a functional state, only for it to be stolen away

Written by Hareth Al Bustani



THE UMAYYAD CALIPHATE

In a single generation, the Muslim community built one of the world's greatest empires. Having unified the tribes of Arabia, the Muslim prophet Muhammad died in 632 CE and his close companion, Abu Bakr, was nominated his successor; the caliph, ruler of the realm. After securing the Arabian Peninsula, Abu Bakr launched simultaneous campaigns into Sassanid Mesopotamia and Byzantine Syria. The two empires, exhausted from waging war on one another, were caught off guard. The strategic brilliance of generals, such as Khalid ibn Al-Waleed, combined with the Muslims' lightweight cavalry and adoption of Sassanid and Byzantine methods, saw them conquer Persia, Syria, Anatolia and Egypt - all within a decade. Non-Muslims were simply charged a tax for their freedom of worship; a welcome relief from the oppressive Persian yoke.

When the second caliph, Umar, was murdered, power fell to Uthman, another of the prophet's companions. Despite the vast war booty, tax and tribute now flowing in, Uthman struggled to control his proud provincial governors. His approach of placing members of his Umayyad branch of the Quraysh tribe into prominent positions of power drew complaints of nepotism. In 656, a group of Egyptian rebels killed him in his house in Medina.

The death of Uthman triggered one of the great schisms in the history of Islam, the First Fitna. The brief, chaotic period would sow the seeds of infighting for years to come, giving rise to the eventual Sunni-Shi'a split. After Uthman's murder, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law Ali was elected caliph. The Umayyads, meanwhile, united behind Mu'awiya, governor of Syria, the wealthiest province. Unlike his other family members, Mu'awiya was not tarnished by nepotism - he had been granted his post by Uthman's predecessor, Umar, 15 years earlier.

Accusing Ali of failing to punish Uthman's killers, Mu'awiya roused outrage by displaying the dead caliph's severed finger in the mosque of Damascus. The two leaders met on a battlefield near Raqqa, but agreed to mediate their dispute. Ali's willingness to enter arbitration created

Abd Al-Malik built the Dome of the Rock on the site of Solomon's Temple, giving Islam a foothold in Jerusalem

resentment among a group of fundamentalist supporters, the Kharijites, who later murdered him. Mu'awiya used his strengthened position, popularity and wealth to secure the title of caliph for himself, over Ali's son Hasan – thus cementing the Umayyad dynasty, via his Sufyanid branch of the family.

Leveraging his base of power in Syria, Mu'awiya moved the capital to Damascus and began reorganising his empire into districts – led by provincial governors, known as emirs, the caliph's political and religious leaders in their communities, who delegated through sub-governors and tribal leaders.

Eager to adopt best practice, the Sufyanids leveraged the existing imperial systems the Sassanids and Byzantines had left behind – conducting much court business in Greek, Aramaic, and even Pahlavi. Though Mu'awiya enjoyed a long and illustrious rule, he broke precedent by naming his son Yazid his successor, immediately sparking civil war once again, following his death in 680.

While Mu'awiya had won over most of Ali's supporters, some would never reconcile his murder. As far as they were concerned, if the caliphate were to be passed on dynastically, it should be through the bloodline of the prophet himself. Though Ali's son Hasan had taken himself out of the running, his brother Hussein had not. The enemies of Yazid united behind him, inviting him to Kufa, where his father had ruled from. However, on Yazid's orders, he and his family were massacred along the way.

Yazid faced a graver threat in Ibn Al Zubayr, who proclaimed himself caliph in the Hijaz – the region of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina – and soon controlled most of the empire. After the brief reigns of Yazid and his brother, in 684, power fell into the hands of Marwan – a companion of the prophet, from another branch of the Umayyad family. His son Abd Al-Malik inherited a fractured realm, passed around like hot potatoes, and now split between himself, the anti-Caliphate, the Kharijites and the proto-Shi'ites.

Leaving the Shi'ites and Khajarites to weaken each other, Abd Al-Malik attacked the forces of Ibn Al Zubayr's brother, Mus'ab, in Iraq – eventually bribing them to kill him. However, with the anti-Caliph still in firm control of Mecca, Abd Al-Malik began construction on the magnificent Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, supposedly built on the site of Solomon's Temple – where Muslims believe Muhammad began his journey of heaven. Though he failed to replace Mecca's Kaaba as a pilgrimage destination, he had converted a key Christian and Jewish monument into a Muslim one, establishing a Muslim presence in the holy city.

Frustrated with the rival caliphate in the Hijaz, he sent an army of 20,000 to besiege Mecca, bombarding the city with catapults for six months until Ibn Al Zubayr was dead, and the civil war was finally over. With the empire now his, he turned to state-building and made Arabic the official court language – prompting its spread, even among non-Muslims. He simultaneously minted coins, no longer bearing the image of Sassanid kings, but Arabic lines, proclaiming the oneness of God.

During Umayyad rule, the Islamic world stretched all the way to the Maghreb – where Berbers later rebelled

WHO WAS MUHAMMAD?

How the founder of Islam won everyone over

Muhammad was born into the Hashim clan, of the pre-eminent Meccan Quraysh tribe of merchants, in roughly 570. At the time, Mecca was dominated by polytheistic pagan cults, devoted to idol worship, and home to the Kaaba, an important pagan shrine. When he turned 40, Muhammad began having religious experiences and later started to preach a monotheistic faith, which he said was transmuted to him by the Archangel Gabriel. Though he succeeded in attracting devoted followers, he also earned himself the ire of Mecca's wealthy pagans and eventually had to flee to the oasis town of Medina – an event known as the Hijra, marking the start of the Islamic calendar, and the first autonomous Muslim community.

Eventually, Medina's rising status brought it into direct conflict with Mecca. The Muslim prophet proved a brilliant military strategist, adopting advanced methods from the Sassanids and Byzantines – such as archery and trench digging. Eventually, his outnumbered army overcame its wealthier counterpart, paving way for the Muslim takeover of Mecca itself, followed by Islam's dominance of the region. By the time of his death in 632, Muhammad had united the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula, through a network of alliances and tributaries.

Umayyad mosques pioneered future architectural hallmarks, such as minarets. The most magnificent of all was the Great Mosque of Damascus, completed in 715 with a 152-metre (500-foot) prayer hall atop a natural elevation that had been the site of the Aramean Temple of Hadad, the Roman Temple of Jupiter and the Basilica of Saint John the Baptist. The mosque was the first to feature stone arcades surrounding its court, horseshoe arches, multifoil arches and a dome over the crossing, in the niche that indicates the direction of the Kaaba. Meanwhile, in the absence of a culture of visual arts, palaces were filled with mosaic floors and decorative tiled walls, depicting geometric and floral patterns, laying the foundations of Islamic aesthetics for centuries to come.

Though expansion had previously stalled, Abd Al-Malik was keen to continue waging jihad on non-believers. In 712 a campaign led by the teenage Muhammed ibn Al Qasim brought northwest India into Muslim hands. The Umayyads simultaneously wrested most of North Africa from the Byzantines, even capturing Carthage – opening up a gateway into Europe. Under the reign of his son, Al Walid, a Muslim Berber chieftain launched a campaign into Spain, defeating the Visigoth king, Roderick, before rapidly seizing most the country. By 713, with

The Great Mosque of Damascus was an architectural masterpiece, pioneering various cornerstones of Islamic architecture

the North African governor now also involved, the Muslim army had established itself on the southern coast of Spain, now named Andalusia.

Stretching from Spain to China, the Muslim empire had now reached its peak. When the governor of Spain later led raids into Gaul, he was killed by the Franks in a 732 battle at Poitiers - the furthest the Muslims would ever push into Western Europe. In the Maghreb, unhappy with the harsh Arab governor of Tangier, a group of three Kharijite confederations revolted. Though this was quashed in 742, the Umayyads were ultimately expelled, and Morocco was liberated from imperial rule for good.

During the Umayyad Caliphate, great tribes had been fragmented, relocated and reconstructed. Among the Arab settlers in northern Khurasan were members of Muhammad's Hashemite branch of the Quraysh tribe, who actually adapted to Iranian life. They were supported by the locals, who resented being treated as second-class citizens, even though many had converted and attached themselves to Arab tribes. The Abbasids, a branch descending directly from the prophet's uncle, leveraged the discontent, sending an envoy to raise an army of Arab and Iranian dissidents in the region.

Though Caliph Hisham had just about managed to hold the empire together, he had sworn to name his predecessor's son, Al Walid, his heir. Unlike the pious Hisham, who built modest palaces and encouraged his scholars to put their ideas to pen, his nephew was engaged more in the extravagance of worldly pleasures; hunting, gallivanting and drinking - making him a scandalous figure in a crumbling realm.

Al Walid was overthrown and killed by cousin Yazid III, who reportedly cut off his head, sprinkled wine over it and paraded it around Damascus. However, Yazid himself would die just six months later, and his brother only lasted 70 days before he found himself being overthrown by Marwan II, from a different string of the family, in 744. Amid the chaos, the Abbasids broke out in full rebellion.

Fighting under a black banner, the Abbasids scored numerous victories against the Umayyads, culminating in 750's decisive battle at the Great Zab River in north-eastern Iraq. When the major cities of Syria capitulated, Marwan fled to Egypt, where he was hunted down and beheaded. Thus, as its rise was mired in blood, so too was the fall of the Umayyad dynasty.

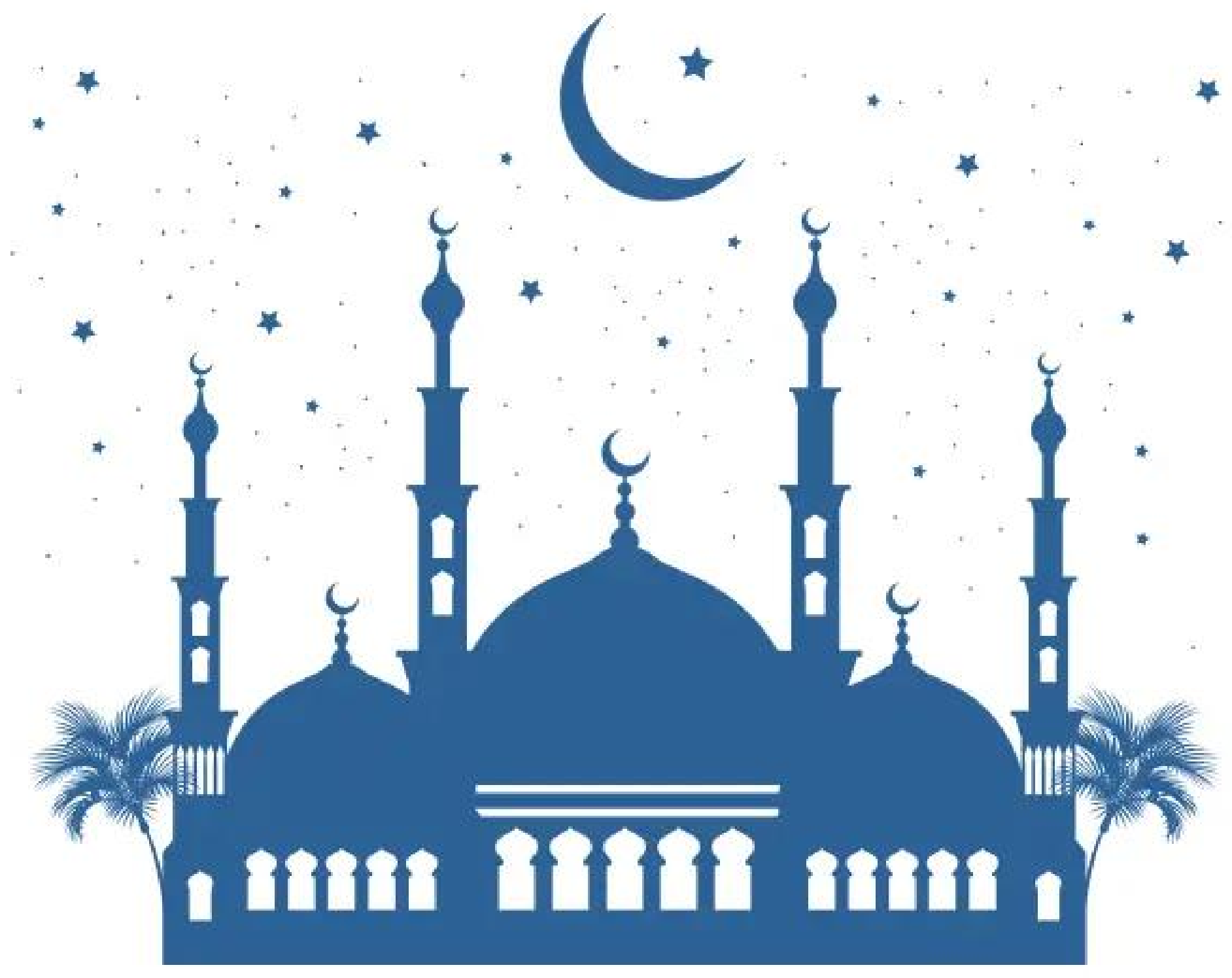
The new caliph, Abu Al Abbas, nicknamed the 'Shedder of Blood', invited the remaining members of the Umayyad family to a feast, where he had them clubbed to death before the meal was served. Only Abd Al Rahman survived, escaping to Spain, where he established an independent Emirate of Córdoba - continuing the dynasty there until the 11th century. The Abbasid caliph, meanwhile, moved his imperial capital to Iraq, where the dynasty would continue to rule for half a millennium, until the Mongol sack of Baghdad.

THE EMIRATE OF CÓRDOBA

A new nation on the Iberian peninsula saw an extension of the Umayyad dynasty

After escaping the purge of his family, Abd Al Rahman, whose mother was a Berber, fled to Spain, where he succeeded in establishing an independent emirate. The newfound state covered two-thirds of the Iberian Peninsula, with the kingdoms of Galicia, Asturias and Castile to the north. Ruling from Córdoba, the Umayyads centralised control over the provinces, while fortifying its northern border. As commerce and trade with Christian Europe and the Muslim Mediterranean blossomed, Córdoba, Seville, Valencia, Toledo and Granada thrived - evidenced by the splendour of the Grand Mosque of Córdoba, designed to rival the great Islamic monuments.

The court became a beacon for the best and brightest minds of the Islamic world, luring many a polymath from the Abbasid Empire, such as Ziryab, the 'Blackbird' of Andalusia. The emirate provided protection to Jews and Christians, in return for the jizya tax, and Jews enjoyed better treatment than they had under the previous Visigoth rulers. While there was originally some conflict between converts and the Arab elite, the 10th-century Abd Al Rahman III made reforms, leading to high levels of Christian and Jewish participation. He also declared himself caliph, to counter the Fatimid anti-Caliph, but after an 11th-century Berber rebellion, the caliphate was quickly split between warlords.



THE ABBASID CALIPHATE

Uncover the empire that celebrated the Islamic Golden Age, and how it still impacts us today

Written by Jem Duducu

From the 8th century CE, while Europe descended into the Dark Ages, the Islamic world excelled at philosophy, science and mathematics. Known as the Islamic Golden Age, this era coincided with the rise of the Abbasid Caliphate, which ruled most of the Muslim world from Baghdad, in what is now Iraq, from 750 to 1258. Centrally located between Europe and Asia, Baghdad became a hub for trade and the exchanging of brilliant ideas. The city's scholars translated Ancient Greek and Roman writers into Arabic, as well as texts from Persia, India and China. However, rather than simply preserving or imitating these great works, Islamic thinkers expanded on them, making incredible advances and spreading this knowledge throughout the Muslim world – all the way from modern-day Pakistan to Moorish Spain.

The Islamic Golden Age gave us many concepts that we take for granted today. For example, most mathematical and scientific words beginning with 'al' indicate an Islamic origin, so algebra, the star Algol and chemical compounds like alkali and – perhaps surprisingly, considering it is generally considered haram ('forbidden') for Muslims – alcohol. Even the way we count is thanks to Muslim mathematicians. The Romans had no value or symbol for 0; this was invented in India and spread west by Islamic mathematicians. The English word 'zero' also comes from the Arabic 'sifr' (from which we also get the word 'cipher').

The Golden Age was brought to an end after 500 years by Genghis Khan's grandson, Hulagu Khan. The Mongol sacked Baghdad, killed the Abbasid caliph Al-Musta'sim, and burned down the city's great library and scientific buildings. However, much of the knowledge of this era survived in the wider Islamic culture. From the 11th century, Moorish scholars began translating much of this work from Arabic into Latin so Europeans could understand it. Here, we celebrate ten intellectuals whose impact on the world is still being felt 1,000 years later.

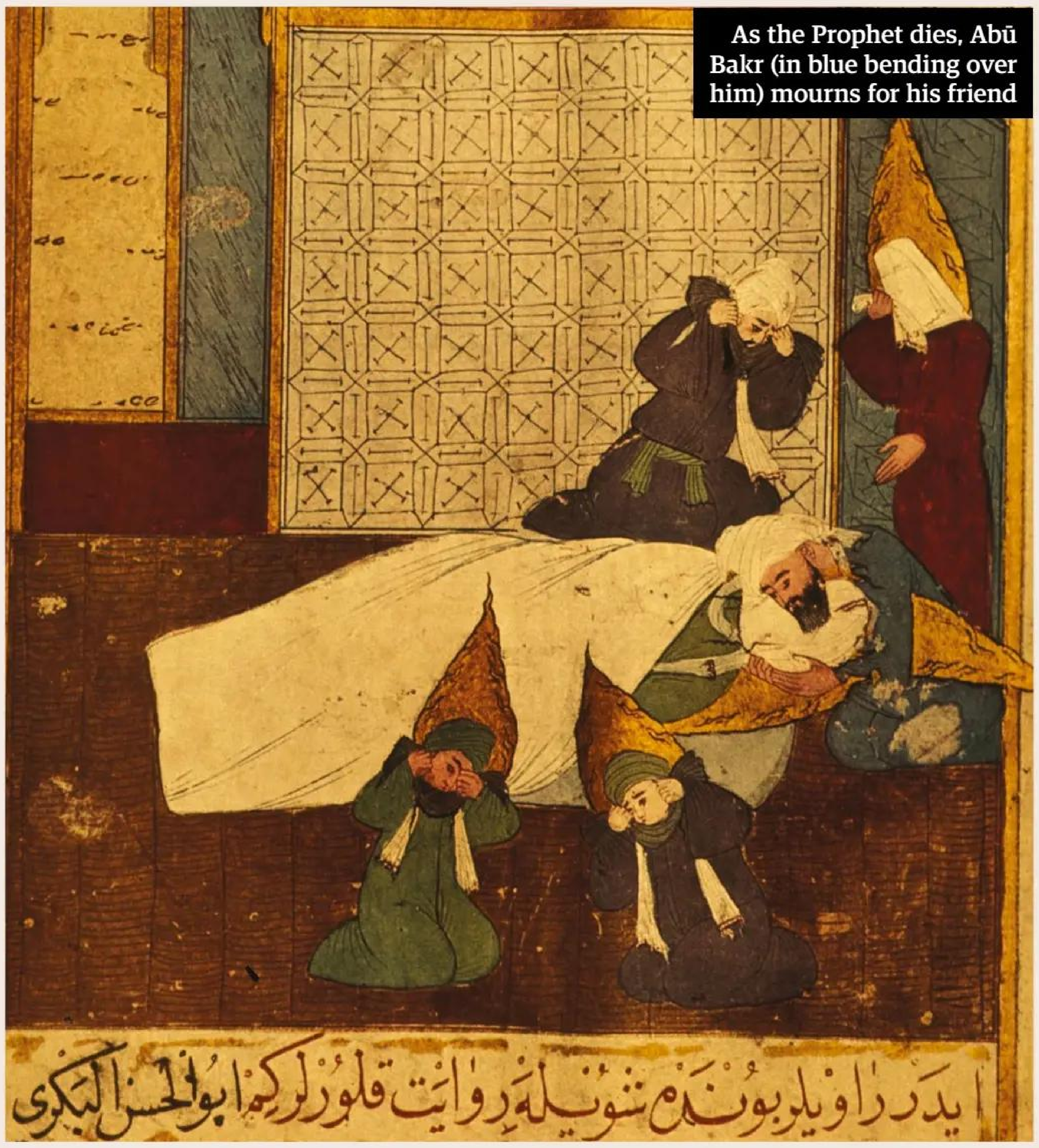
ABŪ BAKR 573–634

The caliph who commissioned the Qur'an

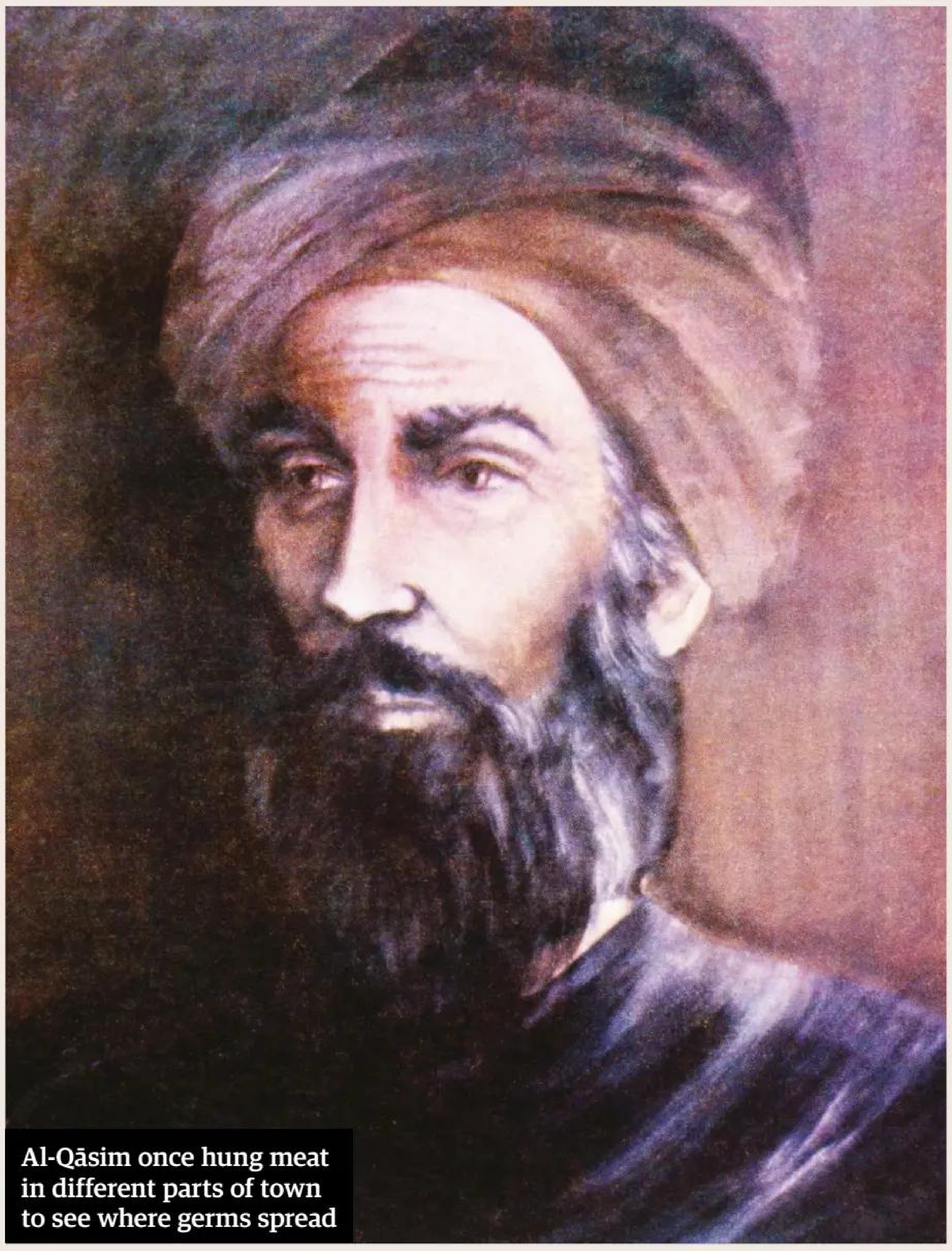
Also known as al-Siddīq, Abū Bakr was the Prophet Muhammad's trusted companion. After the founder of Islam's death, Abū Bakr was appointed the first caliph – the chief Muslim civil and religious ruler. During his brief reign from 632-34, he suppressed tribal politics and religious uprisings to bring central Arabia under Muslim control. Under his rule the Muslim conquests of Iraq and Syria began, but his greatest contribution to Islam far exceeds territorial gains.

Most non-Muslims don't realise that the Prophet Muhammad did not write the Qur'an. The story of its revelation is that when the Angel Gabriel (Jibril in Arabic and yes, the same one from the Bible) visited the Prophet, Muhammad had to memorise what he was told. In turn, Muhammad relayed the holy word to crowds, and his followers were also expected to commit the knowledge to memory. However, Abū Bakr understood that his empire was far too large to spread the word of the Prophet through oral tradition alone. Worse still, the death of several Qur'an reciters at the Battle of Yamama risked parts of the sacred scripture being lost entirely. As a result, he had Muhammad's revelations formally written down and codified shortly before he died, producing the cornerstone of Arabic literature.

> "His greatest contribution to Islam far exceeds territorial gains"


ایدر راویلر بوندن شویله روایت قلورلر کیم ابو الحسن البکری

As the Prophet dies, Abū Bakr (in blue bending over him) mourns for his friend



Al-Qāsim once hung meat in different parts of town to see where germs spread

ABU AL-QĀSIM 936–1013

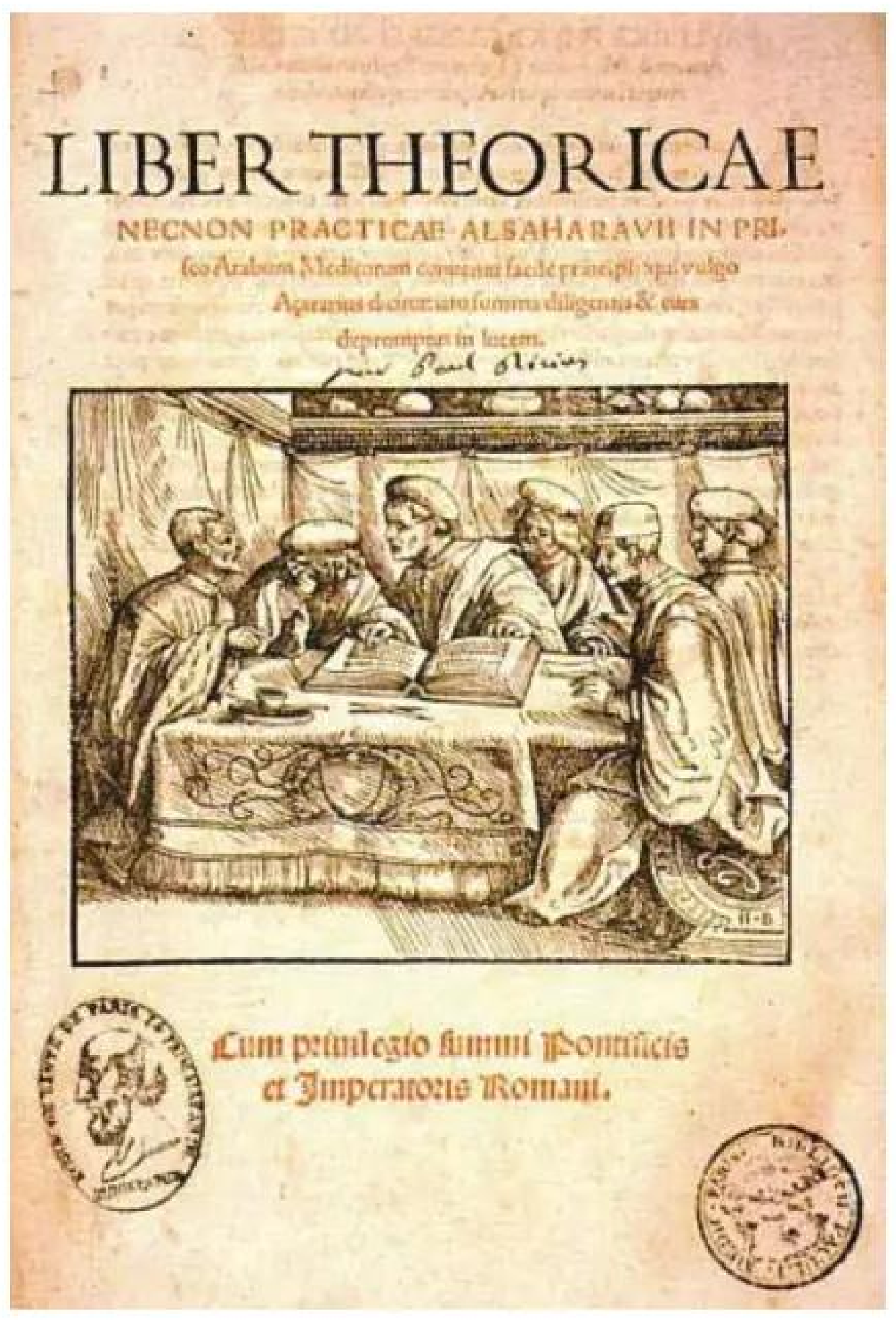
The greatest surgeon of the Middle Ages

Al-Qāsim lived in al-Andalus, modern-day Andalusia in central and southern Spain. It is a reminder of how far-reaching the Islamic caliphate was. It was here that he practised new forms of medicine, and his findings are preserved in his masterwork, *Kitab al-Tasrif*, a 30-volume encyclopaedia of medical information, experiments and practices.

Al-Qāsim was not only the first to observe that haemophilia was hereditary (along with other breakthroughs in medicine), but he also designed new surgical instruments, including ones to remove debris from the ear and nose, and another to inspect the interior of the urethra and remove kidney stones.

At a time when head wounds were left to self-heal or degenerate, al-Qāsim was interested in treating them. One of his most impressive feats was to remove fluid from the brain with no resulting infection, a challenge even to modern doctors. His practices were concurrent with the time in Anglo-Saxon England when bloodletting was common and, if the patient bled too much, the wound might even be blocked with horse dung.

That's not to say that everything he wrote would make medical sense now. In the *Kitab al-Tasrif*, there's a section about cosmetics and makeup that allegedly argues (in his own words) that these are the "medicine of beauty".



LIBER THEORICAE

NECNON PRACTICAE ALSAHARAVII IN PRI-

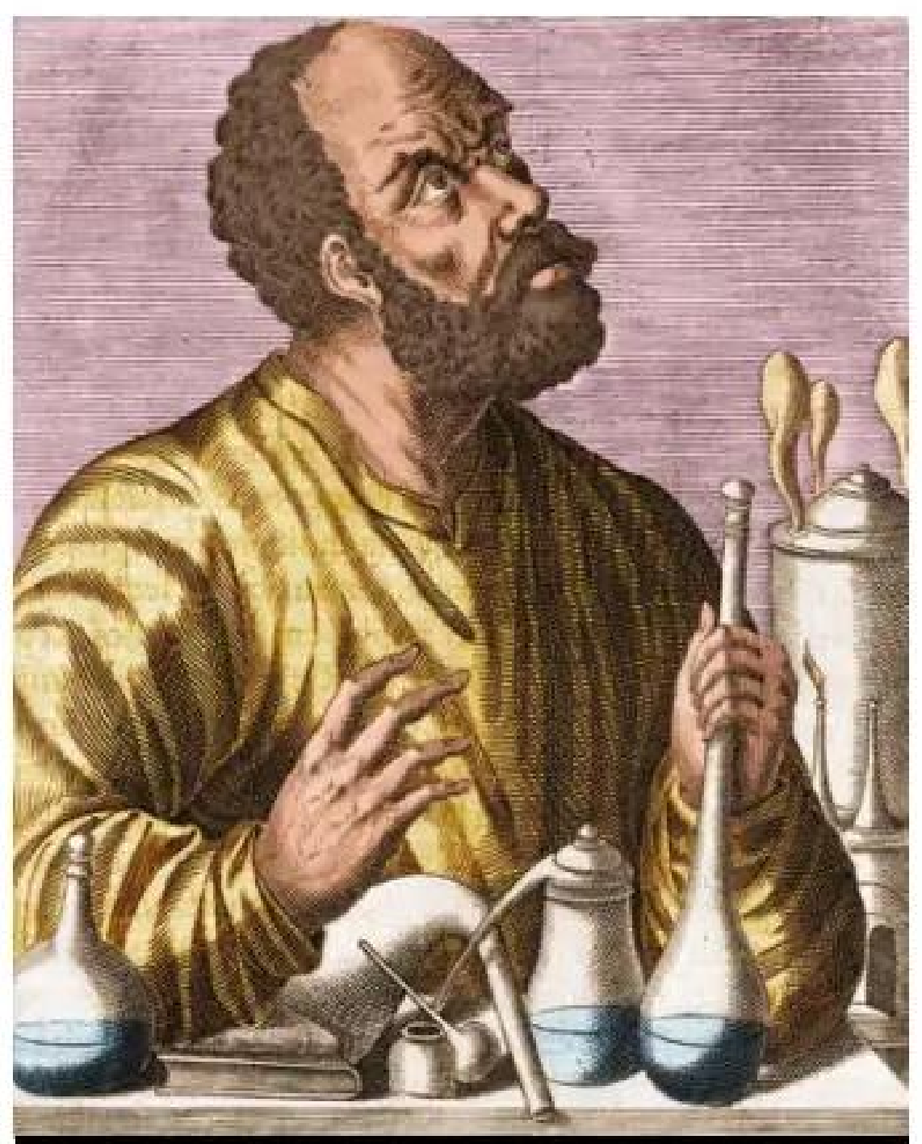
Cum priuilegio summi Pontificis
et Imperatoris Romani.

A Latin version of al-Qāsim's work

JĀBIR IBN HAYYĀN

C.721 – C.815

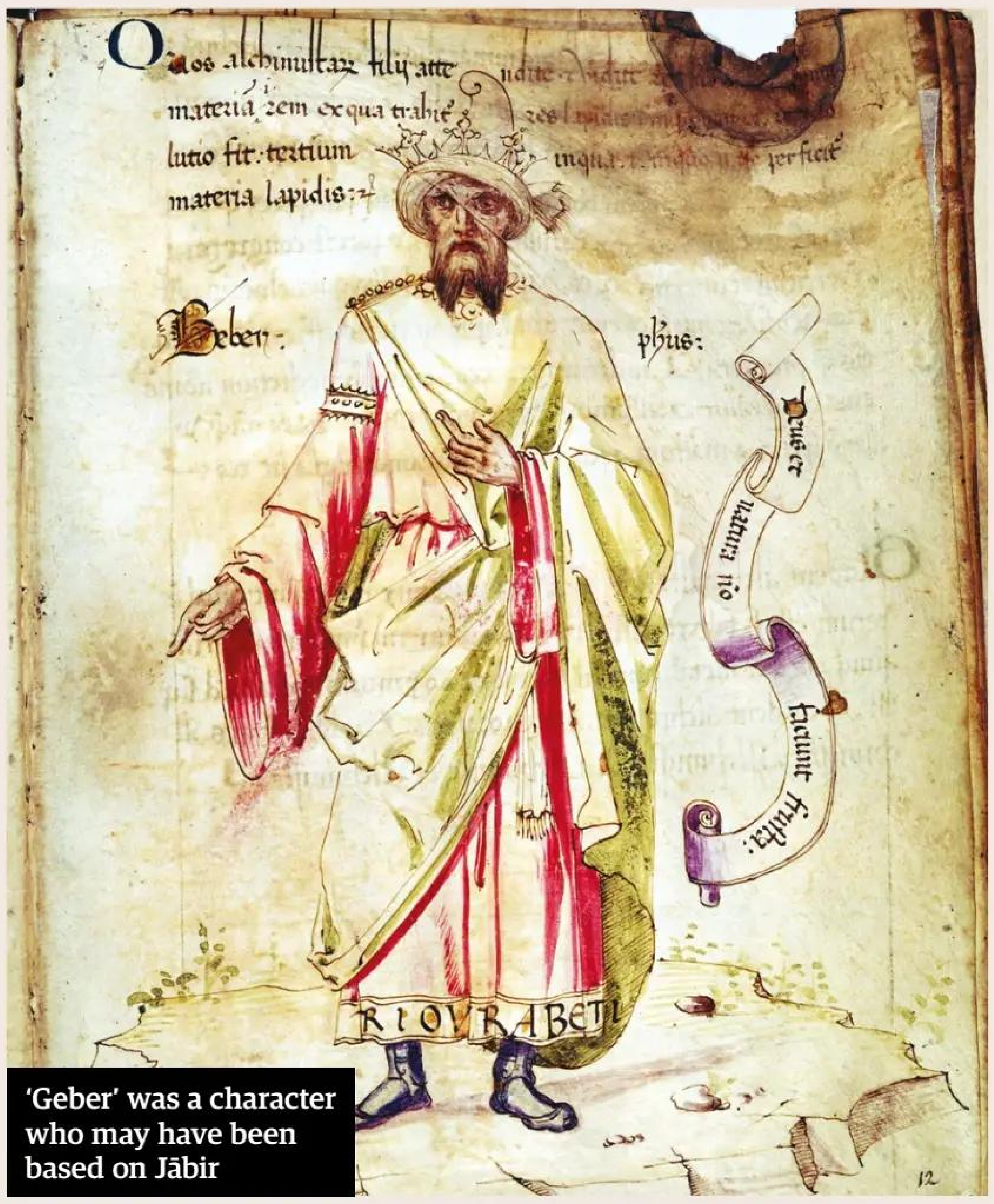
This Persian alchemist put experimentation at the heart of research


Jābir was an inventor as well as a chemist

The Persian polymath Abū Mūsā Jābir ibn Hayyān has nearly 3,000 treatises, texts and articles credited to him, on topics ranging from music and medicine to grammar and geometry. This is a suspiciously large body of work, and some modern scholars think only about half of them are actually his. Even so, it's a sign of Jābir's influence and standing that these other works were assumed to be written by him as well.

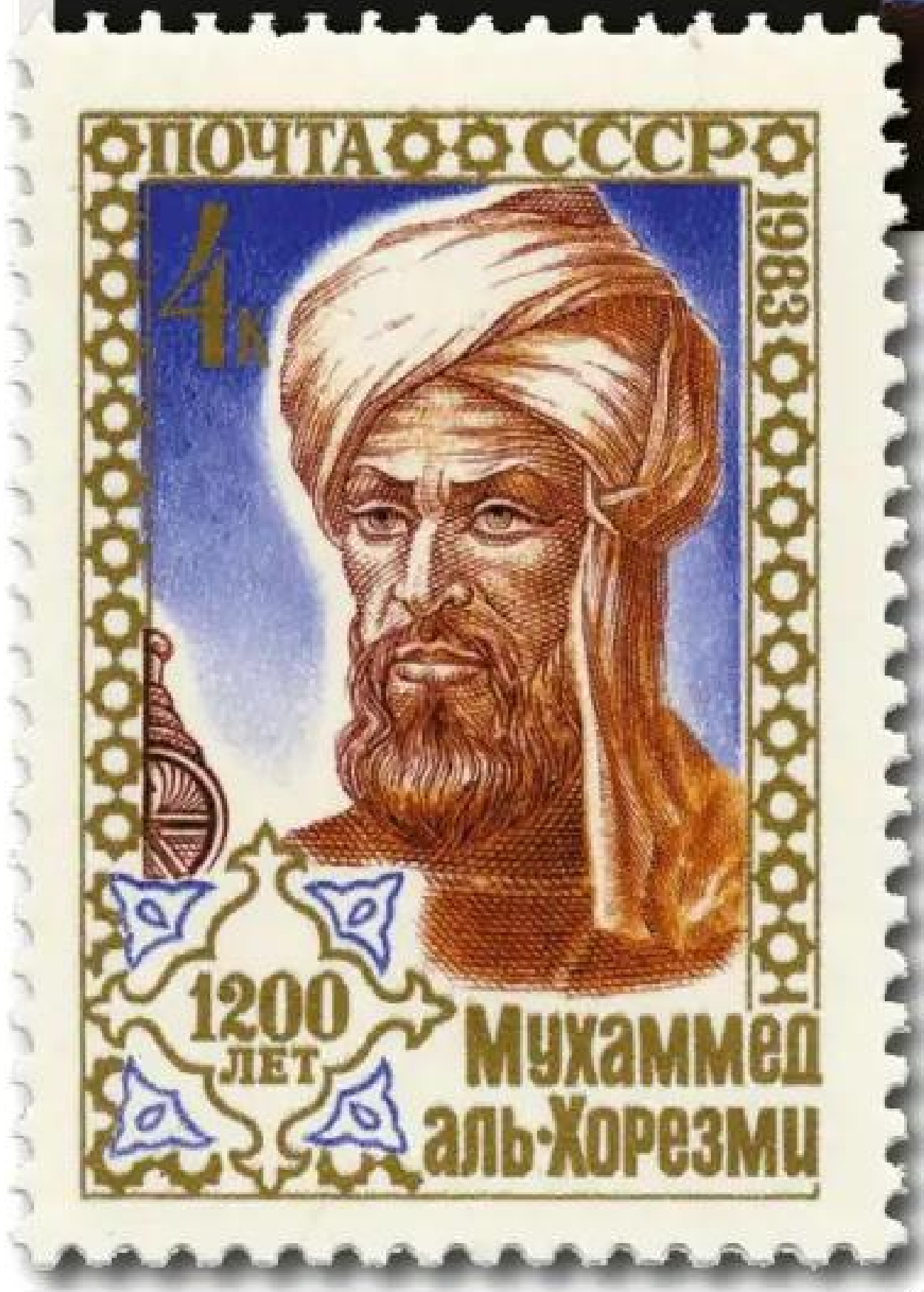
Jābir is regarded as the father of Arabic chemistry, in which he showed surprising scientific rigor. He invented over 20 types of laboratory equipment (including the alembic and retort), described specific processes to distil wine and sulphuric acid, and began classifying elements into different categories, arguably foreshadowing the periodic table. However, most significantly of all, he emphasised the importance of experimentation in his scientific research.

After Jābir's death, a mutilated version of his work was published in Europe under the Latinised name of Geber. Called the *Summa Perfectionis Magisterii* (The Sum of Perfection), the book became the most famous book on alchemy of the Middle Ages. While Jābir certainly tried to find the philosopher's stone – a mythic compound that could bestow eternal life – the father of Arabic chemistry was in another league to the many mystics and charlatans that have invoked his name ever since.



'Geber' was a character who may have been based on Jābir

Al-Khwārizmī would have used tools like this astrolabe for tracing the path of the stars



This 1983 stamp from the USSR depicts Al-Khwārizmī

AL-KHWĀRIZMĪ

C.780 – C.850

The mathematician who reached for the stars

Around 820 CE, Muhammad ibn Mūsā al-Khwārizmī was appointed as the astronomer and head of the Library of the House of Wisdom in Baghdad. It was the equivalent nowadays of receiving the Nobel Prizes for both Literature and Physics at the same time.

However, it is his book *The Compendious Book on Calculation by Completion and Balancing* that elevates his status to the likes of Euclid in terms of mathematical prowess. In it he presents a systematic solution to linear and quadratic equations, the first person to do so. It was the power of Arabic numbers rather than Latin numerals that allowed far more complex mathematics to develop, which helped in the study of other areas of science. Another of his texts, *Astronomical Tables*, proved to be a turning point in Islamic astronomy. Prior to Al-Khwārizmī, Muslim astronomers had only translated the works of others, but now they were starting to make their own discoveries.

> "Another of his texts... proved to be a turning point"

Over 100 stars in the sky have Arabic names, including many of the brightest ones

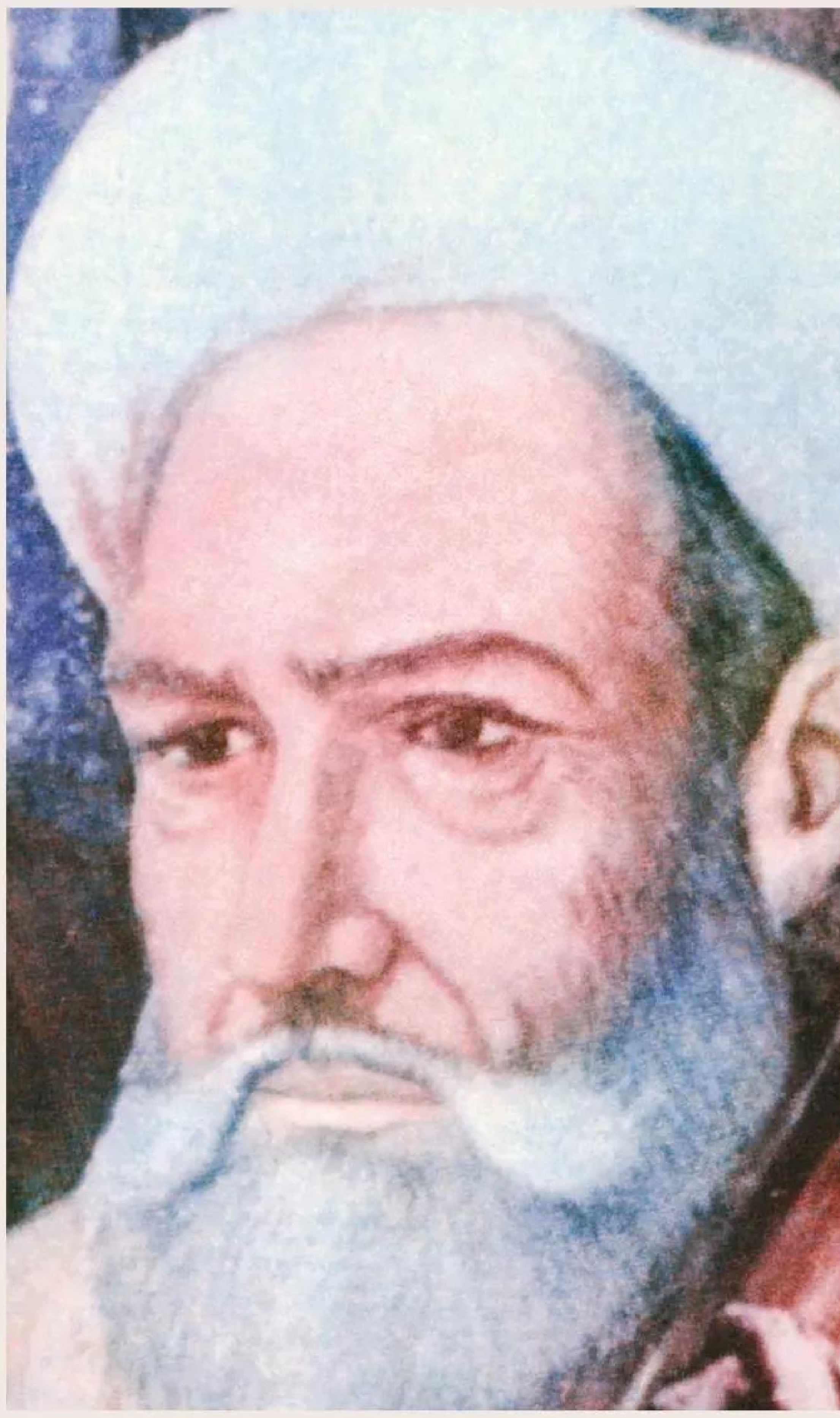
AL-FĀRĀBĪ C.870 – C.950

This scholar was a great preserver, but only the 'second teacher'

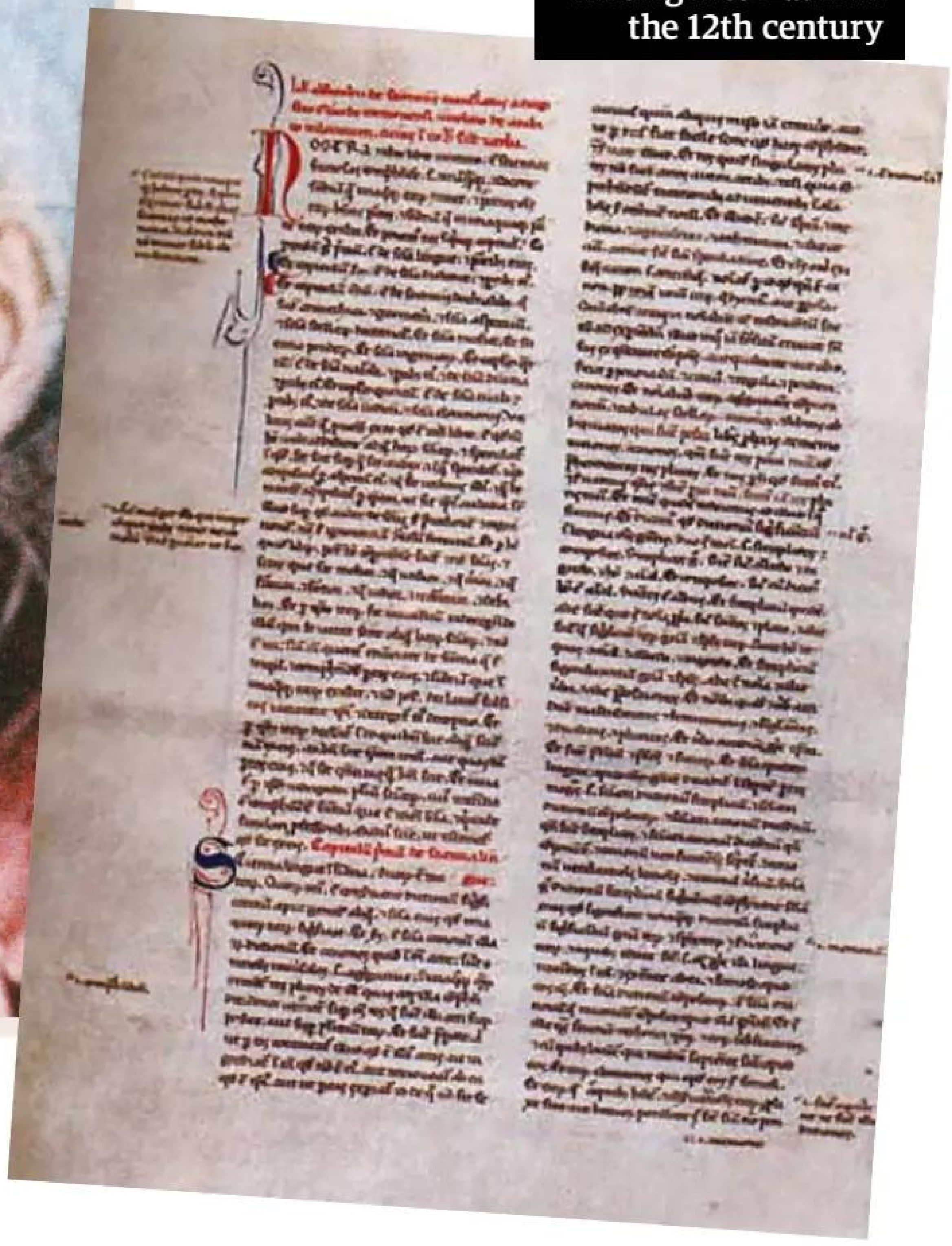
The writings of the Romans and Greeks were not preserved in Latin by the Church and then rediscovered in the Renaissance. In reality, many of these masterworks of philosophy, mathematics and science were translated by Muslim scholars to be spread throughout the land. The European translations were actually from the Arabic, not from the original Greek and Latin.

One of the most prolific of these Arabic scholars was Al-Fārābī, also known as Alpharabius and Avennasar in the West. Not only did he translate texts, but he wrote treatises on them, often building on concepts, most notably Aristotle's. He could even be said to be a Neo-Platonist, and he wrote philosophical treaties in the East at a time when intellectual activities in the West consisted largely of copying of the Gospels.

To learned Islamic scholars, Aristotle was referred to as the 'first teacher', such was the standing of this pagan thinker in the Muslim world. As a result of his work based on Aristotle's concepts, Al-Fārābī was nicknamed 'the second teacher'.

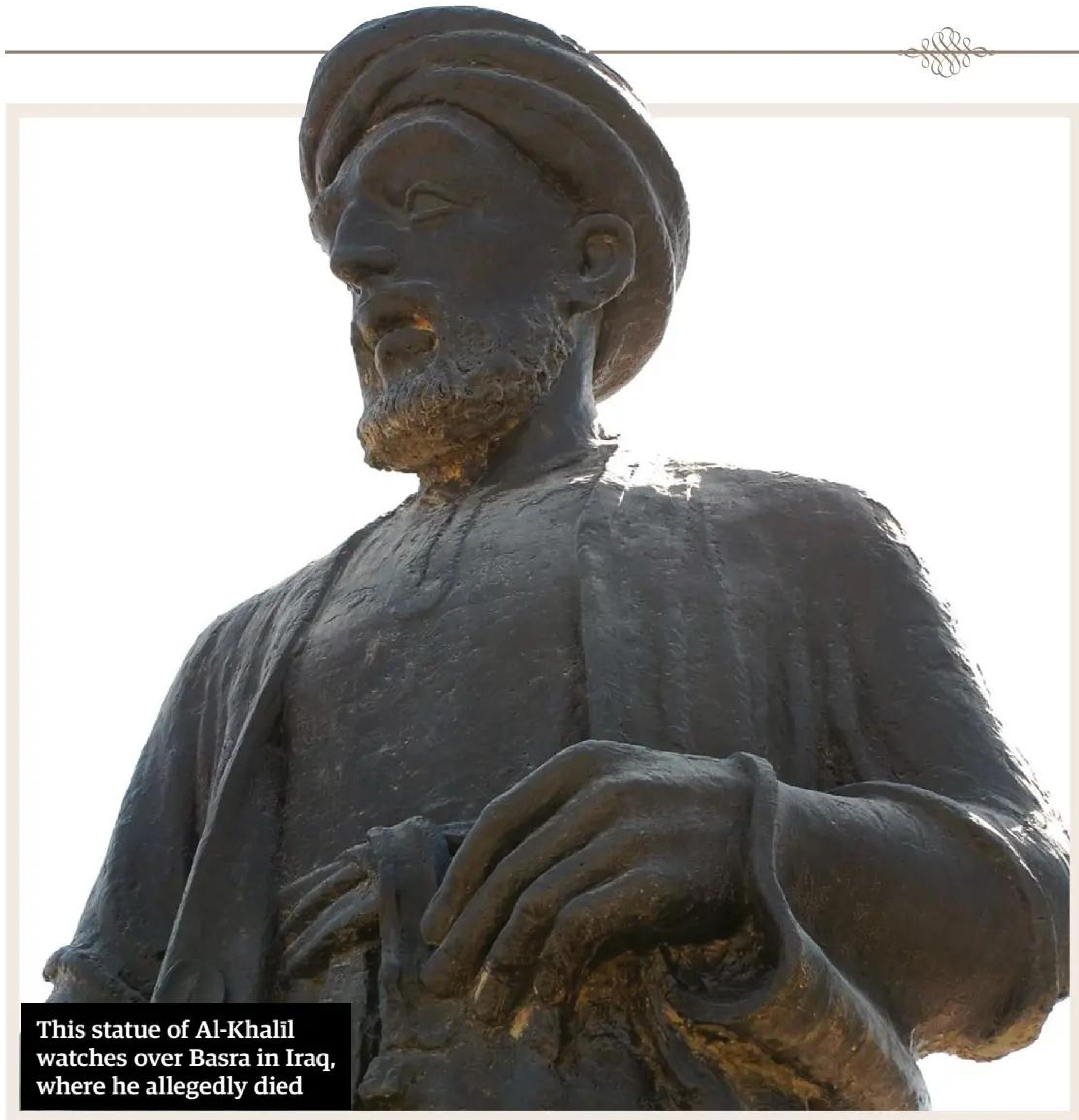


Al-Fārābī dabbled in science and was one of the greatest minds of his day



Gerard of Cremona translated Al-Fārābī's writing into Latin in the 12th century

> "He wrote treatises, often building on concepts, most notably Aristotle's"



This statue of Al-Khalīl watches over Basra in Iraq, where he allegedly died

AL-KHALĪL IBN AHMAD

718–786

The author of the first Arabic dictionary

Al-Khalīl was a man who studied the Arabic language and was instrumental in standardising it. This is important, because while Latin was the lingua franca of Medieval Europe, Arabic was the common tongue of the Middle East. But regional variations were widespread, which could cause confusion. Full name Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Khalīl ibn Ahmad al-Farāhīdī al-Azdī, the philologist's work resulted in the first Arab language dictionary (possibly the first dictionary ever) about 1,000 years before Samuel Johnson wrote his famous compendium of English. Al-Khalīl's rhythms and rules have since set the standard for the pace of the Arabic language and of Arabic poetry too.

Al-Khalīl was so important to regulating the language that he became a household name across the Arab world in his own lifetime. However, he had other talents and was well versed in astronomy, mathematics, Islamic law and musical composition. He also wrote a book on cryptography, the study of codes and ciphers. Encryption had been used to hide the meaning of messages since the time of the Ancient Greeks, but it may have been thanks to 'modern' Islamic mathematics and numbers that codes were able to make a leap forwards in terms of complexity. It is small wonder then that Al-Khalīl is widely regarded as the outstanding genius of the Muslim world.

Lubna worked at the caliph's palace, Medina Azahara

LUBNA OF CÓRDOBA

10TH CENTURY

The genius slave girl

Lubna of Córdoba had it very tough. As a slave living in al-Andalus, she was probably a non-Muslim because the Qur'an forbids making slaves of Muslims. While it was standard practice to have slaves convert to Islam, making it a bit of a hypocritical situation, nobody seemed to notice for about 1,000 years.

On top of her lowly status as a slave, being a woman meant Lubna had far fewer rights than her male counterparts. So with this incredibly harsh start in life, it is amazing that she became Caliph Al-Hakam II's poet, scribe and secretary. She could only have achieved this with self-taught reading and writing skills because slave girls didn't receive schooling.

Lubna's first love was always books and learning, which led to her role as the head of the Royal Library of Córdoba, one of the largest libraries in the world at that time. By ensuring a regular supply of new acquisitions, the library had around half a million texts, books and manuscripts when she died. According to a contemporary scholar, "There were none in the Umayyad palace as noble as her." Little more is known about her.

> "She could only have achieved this with self-taught skills"

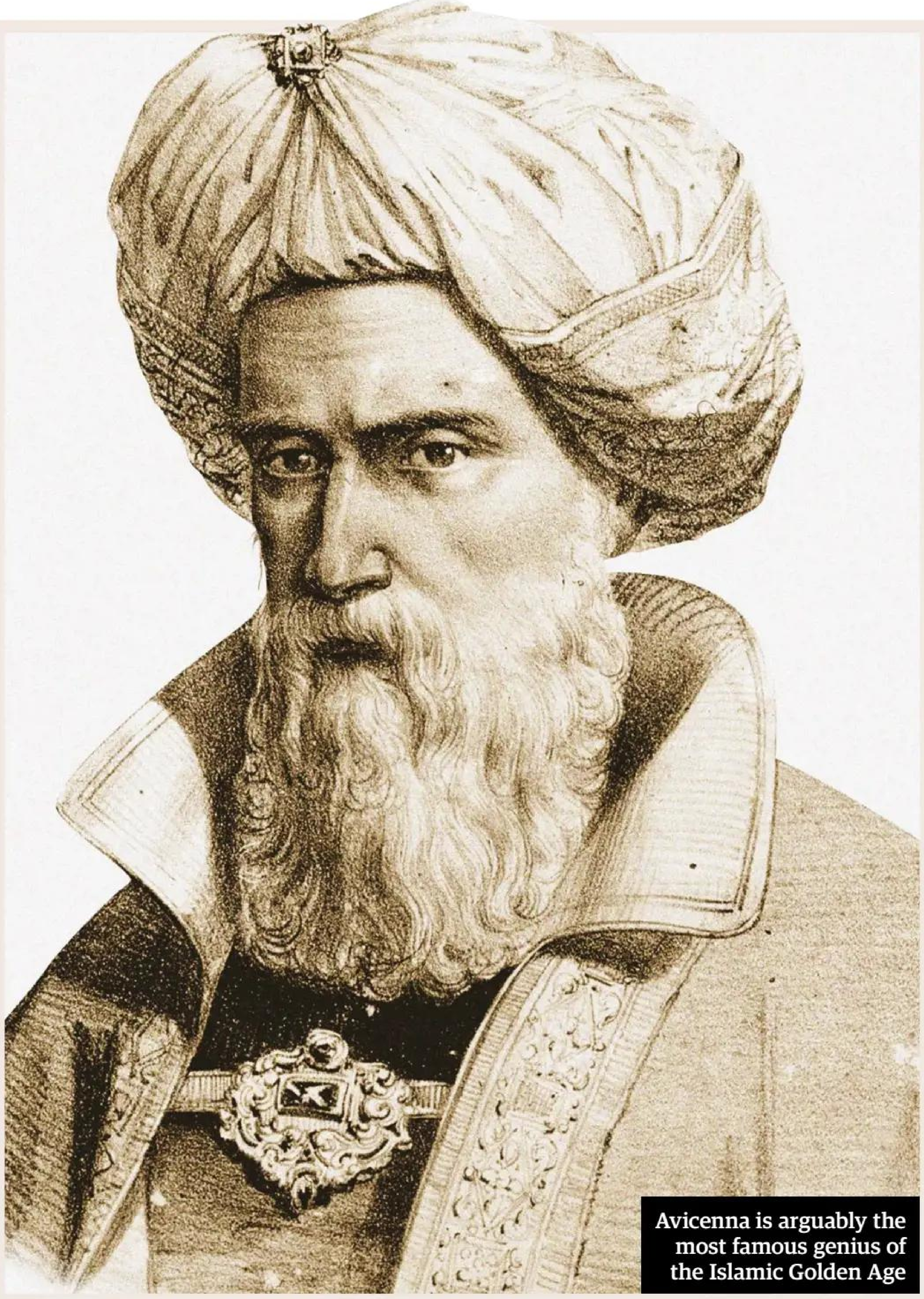
AVICENNA 980–1037

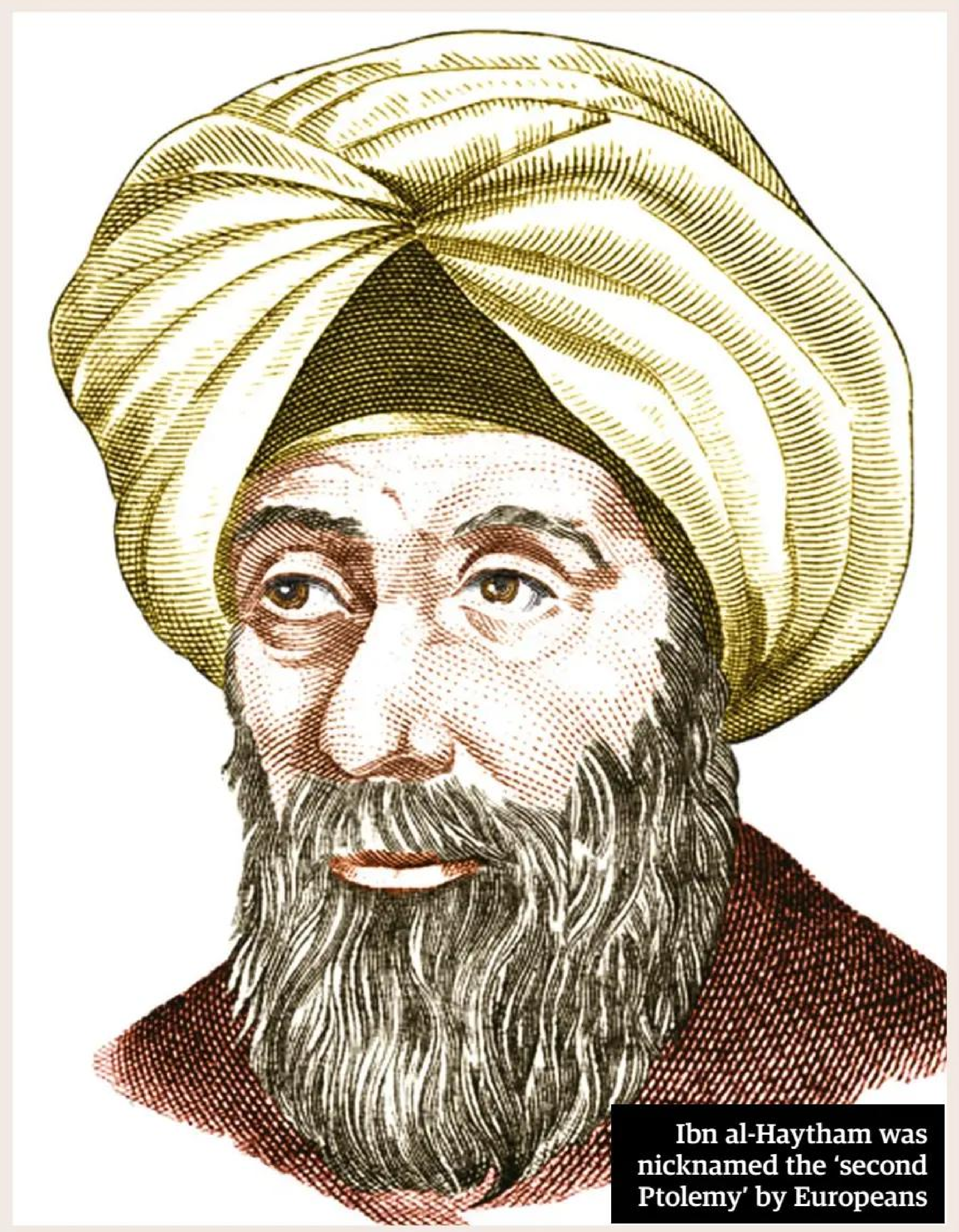
The prolific Persian polymath

Ibn Sīnā, or Avicenna as he's known in the West, was a physician, astronomer and writer. In his lifetime he is thought to have written around 450 works, of which about 240 have survived. In his philosophical pursuits Avicenna pondered the biggest question: what is the nature of our being? He broke this down between essence (Mahiat) and existence (Wujud). In his search for truth he quotes Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, which led to criticism from some quarters about his reliance on non-Muslim thinkers. He ignored their grumbles.

Then there is his rather misleadingly titled text *The Book of Healing*, which has nothing to do with medicine. Divided into four parts, it covers logic, natural sciences, mathematics (including arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music) and metaphysics. Nonetheless, Avicenna is best remembered as a physician. He wrote a five-volume medical encyclopaedia called *The Canon of Medicine*, which suggested a concept of germ theory about 1,000 years before it became accepted by the medical establishment. The book became a standard text in the Islamic world and Europe up to the 18th century.

> Muslim doctors discovered that blood circulated around the body 400 years before the West


Avicenna is arguably the most famous genius of the Islamic Golden Age



Ibn al-Haytham was nicknamed the 'second Ptolemy' by Europeans

IBN AL-HAYTHAM

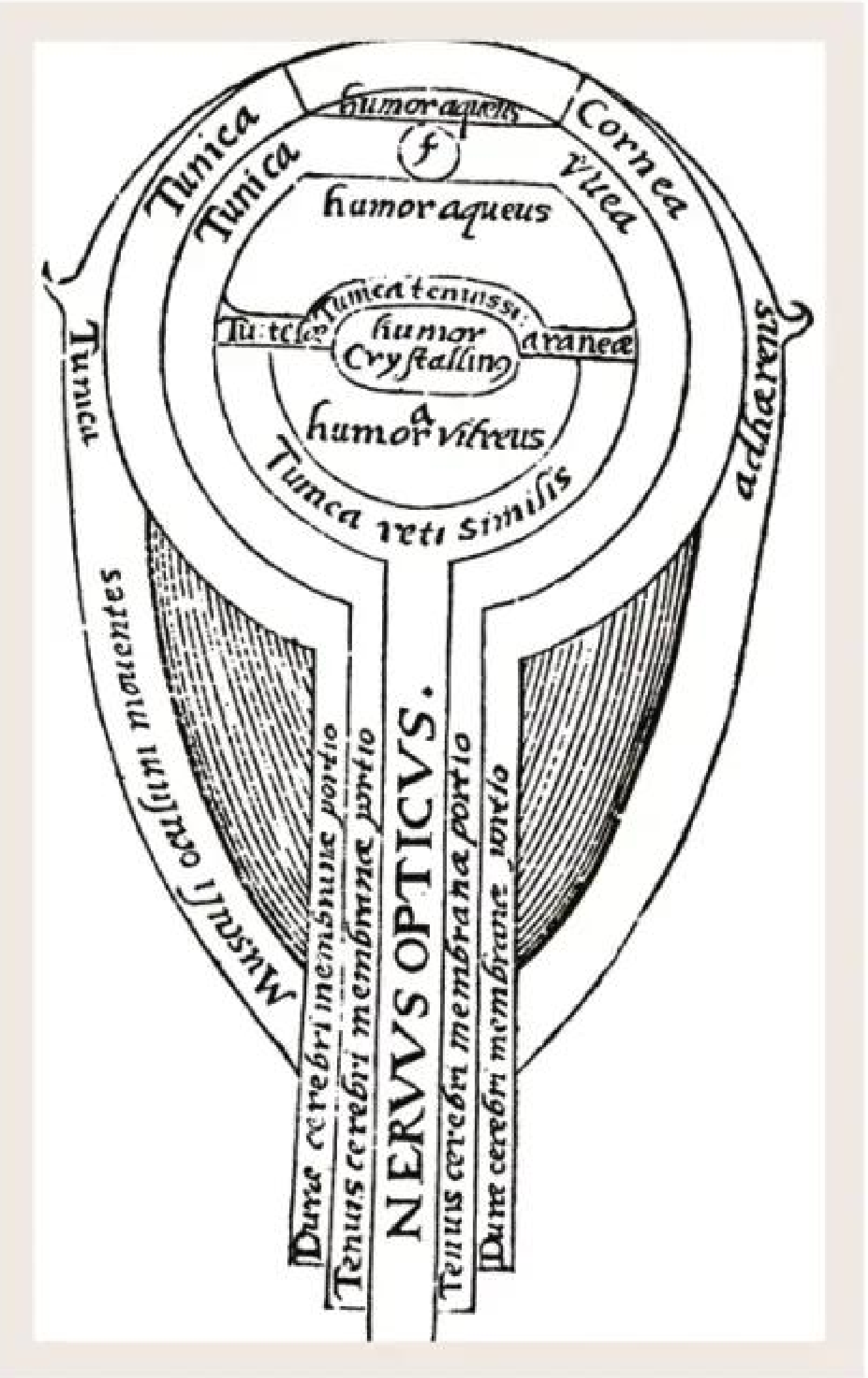
c.965 – c.1040

The scientist who had a keen eye for detail

Ibn al-Haytham's fields were mathematics, astronomy and physics. He believed that a hypothesis must be proved by observable results from experiments based on confirmable procedures and/or mathematical evidence. This is exactly how science works and is now simply called the 'scientific method', but Ibn al-Haytham identified it about 500 years before Renaissance scientists.

Another hugely influential work is his huge treatise on optics, *Kitab al-Manazir* (Book of Optics). At the time there were two different theories about how light and the eye worked, and Ibn al-Haytham showed through experiment that light travels in straight lines and that the eye works with light falling on it. He also invented a type of camera obscura, the theory of which already existed in China but had yet to reach Europe.

Ibn al-Haytham also wrote a book titled *Doubts about Ptolemy*, which was a scientific dissection and rebuttal of some of his works. Ibn al-Haytham was peer reviewing, carrying out scientific methods and learning from observations. It's hard not to argue that he was the world's first proper scientist.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adhærens
Tunica reti similis
Musculi oculum mouentes
Dura cerebri membranæ portio
Tenuis cerebri membranæ portio
NERVVS OPTICVS.
Tenuis cerebri membranæ portio
Duræ cerebri membranæ portio

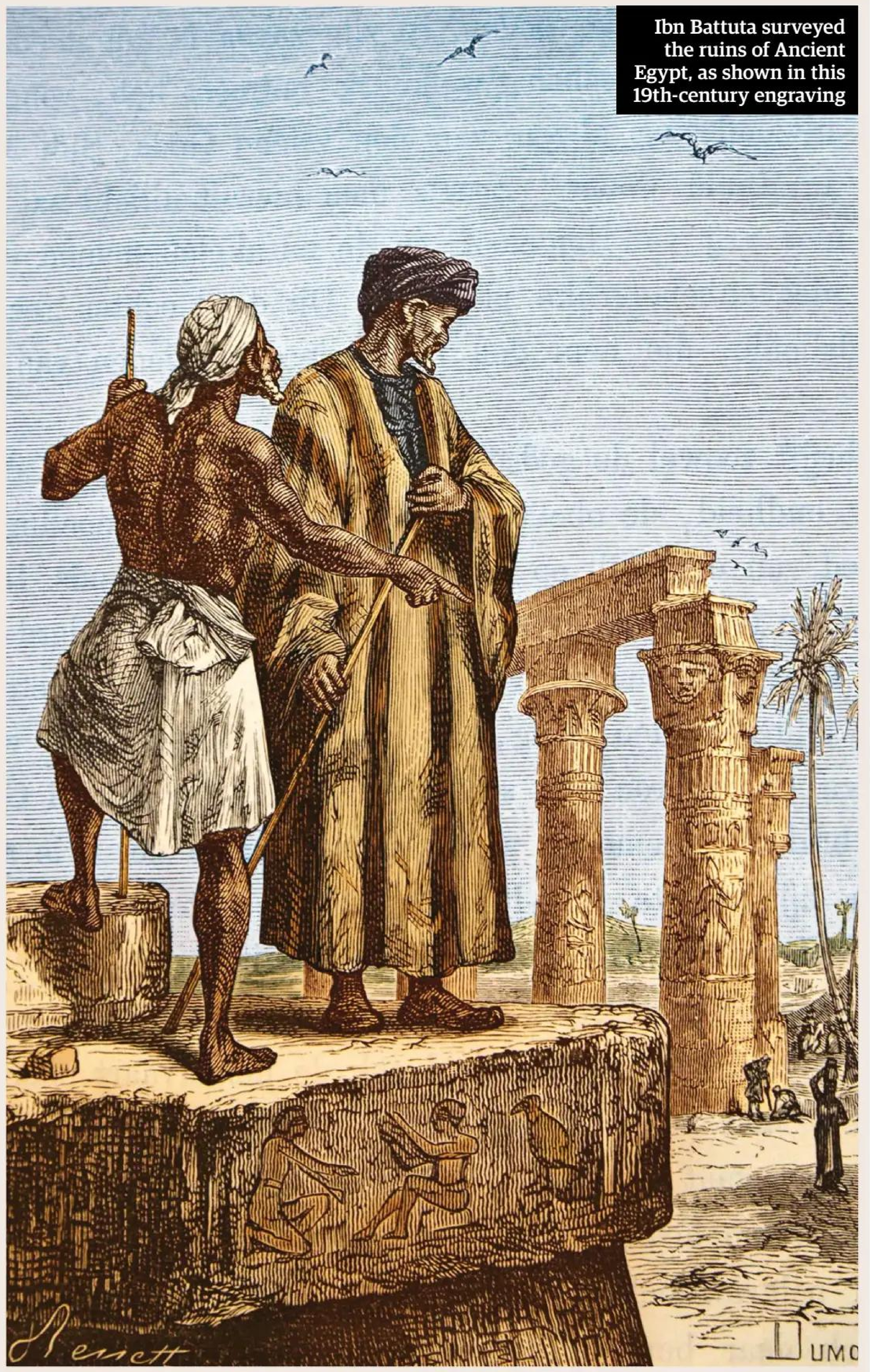
A diagram of the scholar's eye theory

IBN BATTUTA 1304 – c.1368

The explorer with the world at his feet

When it comes to great explorers, Marco Polo and Christopher Columbus come to mind, but both of these men's travels pale in comparison to the life of Ibn Battuta. His years of travel were summarised in his book *A Gift to Those Who Contemplate the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Travelling*. In it he describes how he got the travel bug on his pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca when he travelled from Morocco to modern-day Saudi Arabia, a trip that should have lasted about a year and a half. He would not return home for a quarter of a century.

After completing his pilgrimage, Ibn Battuta toured Egypt then the Middle East, seeing Baghdad when it was still a shadow of its former self following its destruction at the hands of the Mongols some 70 years earlier (this event is often seen as the end of the Islamic Golden Age). From there he continued eastwards through Persia, eventually reaching China. He also visited the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, India and the African Horn. Later in life he went west into Spain. It is estimated he travelled about 75,000 miles in his lifetime.



Ibn Battuta surveyed the ruins of Ancient Egypt, as shown in this 19th-century engraving

© Alamy, Getty Images

The overwhelming number of casualties of the Thirty Years' War were citizens of the Holy Roman Empire

THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

Presiding over 1,000 years of human history, the Holy Roman Empire may have been the most unique empire to ever exist

Written by Frances White

The French philosopher Voltaire once uttered the phrase that the Holy Roman Empire was "neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire". This often-used quote is a clear demonstration of just how confusing and complex the nature of the Holy Roman Empire was. It was not a straightforward one, like that of the British, French or Mongolians, but comprised hundreds of territories that, on their own, enjoyed a great degree of autonomy.

Although it is easy, like Voltaire, to derive the nature of this unique empire, it was also this one-of-a-kind structure that allowed it to survive for over 1,000 years. The rulers of the different lands that made up the empire were able to thrive without a dominant central power, thereby also avoiding a tyrannical despot, often the cause of death of so many states throughout history. Confusing and unique it may have been, but the Holy Roman Empire played a crucial, enduring role in world history.

Keeping in line with the confusing and complex nature of the empire, there is no universally agreed-upon date for the formation of the empire. A popular argument is that it began in 800 CE. When the Western Roman Empire collapsed in the 5th century, the Eastern Roman Empire lived on in what is now regarded as the Byzantine Empire. 300 years after this collapse, Pope Leo III was forced to flee Rome and sought help from the powerful king of the Franks, Charlemagne. After Charlemagne gave Leo the aid he desired, the pope rewarded him by crowning him as king of the Romans, ruling roughly what we would regard as Germany and France today, so the title was transferred from the Eastern Empire to the 'reformed' Western Empire. This didn't ruffle many feathers as at the time the Roman emperor title was being held by a woman, Irene of Athens.

When Charlemagne died in 814, his heirs fought over his empire and the Frankish kingdom ended up being split and reunited several times. Eventually, three key kingdoms emerged that would go on to form the core of the empire, the Kingdoms of Germany, Burgundy and Italy. Until 962, the title of Roman emperor became fairly obsolete. However, in that year, yet again a pontiff needed help – Pope John XII faced invaders from Italy and Otto I, king of the Franks, came to his aid – deposing the Italian king and conquering his kingdom. As reward, Pope John crowned Otto emperor. Otto was the first 'German' to be crowned emperor and it would set the precedent from there on out. Not only was the empire mainly focused in Germany, but nearly all his successors would be German for the remainder of the existence of the empire.

Because of its almost unique set-up – one where its leaders were validated by the papacy, the Holy Roman Empire went through a very complex and difficult relationship with the bishops of Rome, and this is especially true in its early years. There was a very long power struggle that raged between the emperors and popes for centuries. For example, the 'early' years of the empire after Otto's reign were incredibly significant ones, and the empire became the most powerful in Europe. The emperors wanted to use this power to dominate the papacy – an ironic twist of fate for the popes who had given them this power to begin with.

However, this constant jostling of power between emperor and pope led some emperors to depose the pontiffs they did not align with. But the papacy gradually gained power and by the mid-11th century it truly was an almost equally matched battle for dominance, which became known as the Investiture Controversy. This conflict between Church and state led to almost 50 years of civil war in Germany. This war was so monumental that it is often marked as the end of the Early Middle Ages, and set the stage for the High Middle Ages.

When Emperor Frederick II died in 1250 – the final defeat of the empire in this long war – the now strenuous link between the popes and the emperors was shattered. The empire still existed, but it was hugely weakened, not helped by the fact it took some 23 years to decide who would succeed Frederick as ruler. This was the first time this happened, but it would not be the last; the empire would experience two further long stretches where it existed without a leader. Because of this, the role of emperor began to become somewhat marginalised, with the mainly German states within it mostly leading themselves. The autonomy of these individual princes would come to define the unique set-up of the empire.

Because of how difficult it had been to elect leaders, the Golden Bull of 1356 put in place major changes to stabilise the empire. The changes of the Golden Bull did their job, and three centuries of emperors without gaps in reigns followed, all from the same family: the Habsburgs. Thanks to this consistency, the dynasty was able to extend its influence, and its empire.

It is difficult to draw strict borders by modern-day reckonings of the Holy Roman Empire's reach, but it was mainly composed of present-day Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Austria, Czech and Slovak Republics, along with areas of eastern France, northern Italy, Slovenia and western Poland. Although this puts the Holy Roman Empire far down the list of empires of history by land size, if we were to measure by power and significance, due to the large amount of vital European states within it, it would leap up the charts.

When Martin Luther published his *95 Theses* in 1517 and the Protestant Reformation swept through Europe, the empire became divided between those who adopted Lutheranism and those who remained Catholic. These religious tensions crippled the state and plagued it for centuries. Despite this, the empire's overall power did grow thanks to the rule of Charles V. As he was already king of Spain it brought a vast array of territories to Habsburg power. This union of the Holy Roman and Spanish Empires under Charles was the closest Europe ever came to a universal monarchy. Although he fought to quell the spread of Lutheranism, the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 allowed individual rulers to choose the religion of their states – as long as it was either Lutheranism or Catholicism, of course.

When Charles V abdicated, he split his land between Spain and Austria, with his son Ferdinand succeeding him as emperor. Despite the Peace of Augsburg, religious tensions continued to plague Europe and eventually led to the formation of the Dutch Republic, which comprised seven provinces that had left Spain and the Holy Roman Empire. The religious tensions spiralled into the Thirty Years' War, one of the most brutal conflicts in human history, with over 8 million casualties. Lasting from 1618 to 1648, it pitted the Catholic and Protestant states of the empire against each other, but it quickly morphed into a battle for power over Europe, involving all the major powers of the continent.

The war ended with the Peace of Westphalia, a treaty that massively changed the face of Europe. Spain no longer had control over the Dutch Republic, and autonomy was given to the former German-speaking Holy Roman Empire states in central Europe. For many, this decentralisation of power marked the beginning of the end of the empire as a whole. The imperial princely states really began to function as independent ones in their own right. For many historians it's incorrect to even think of the Holy Roman Empire as an empire at all from this point – it was rather a loose federation of varying princes of Germany.

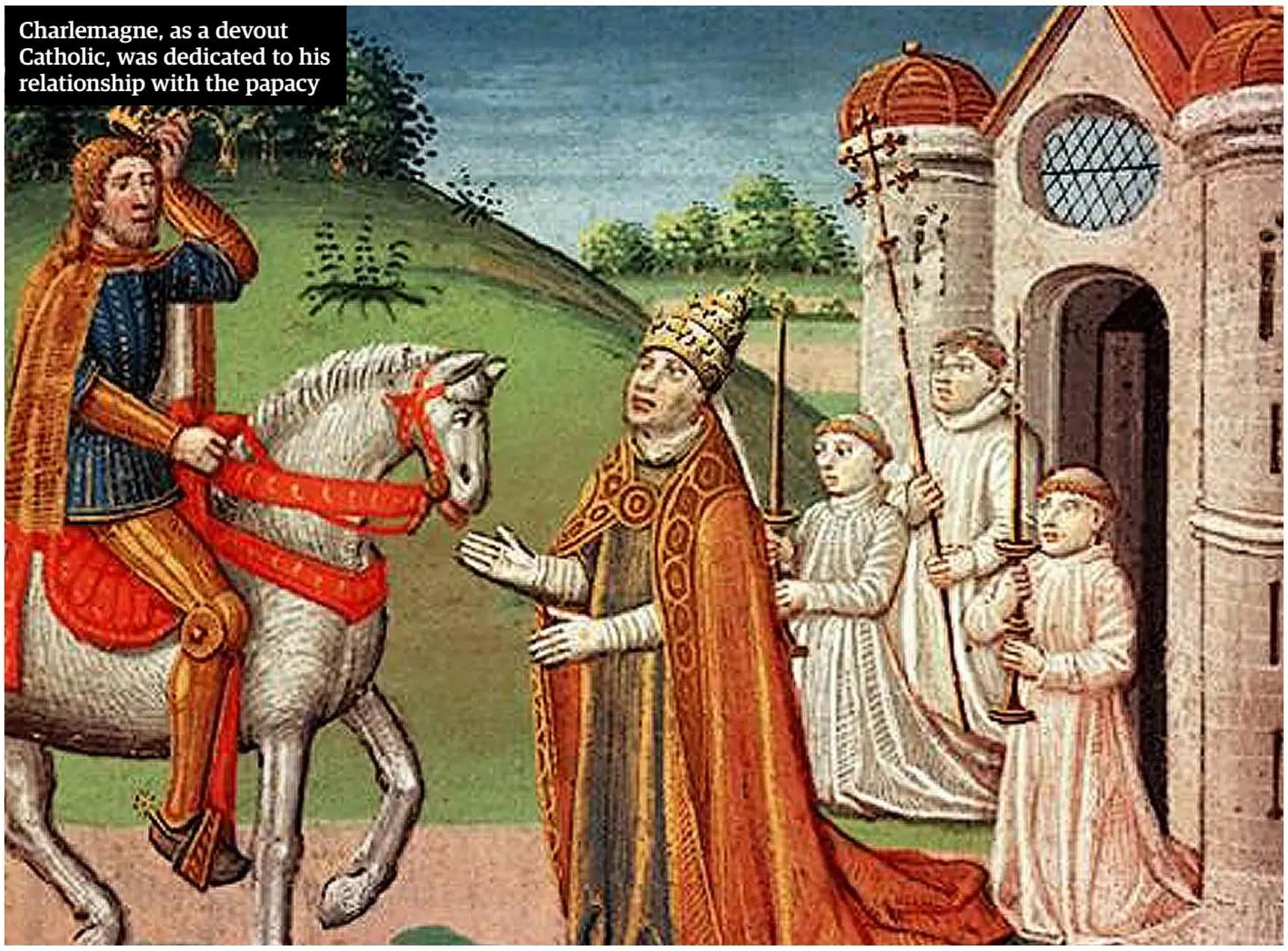
CHOOSING AN EMPEROR

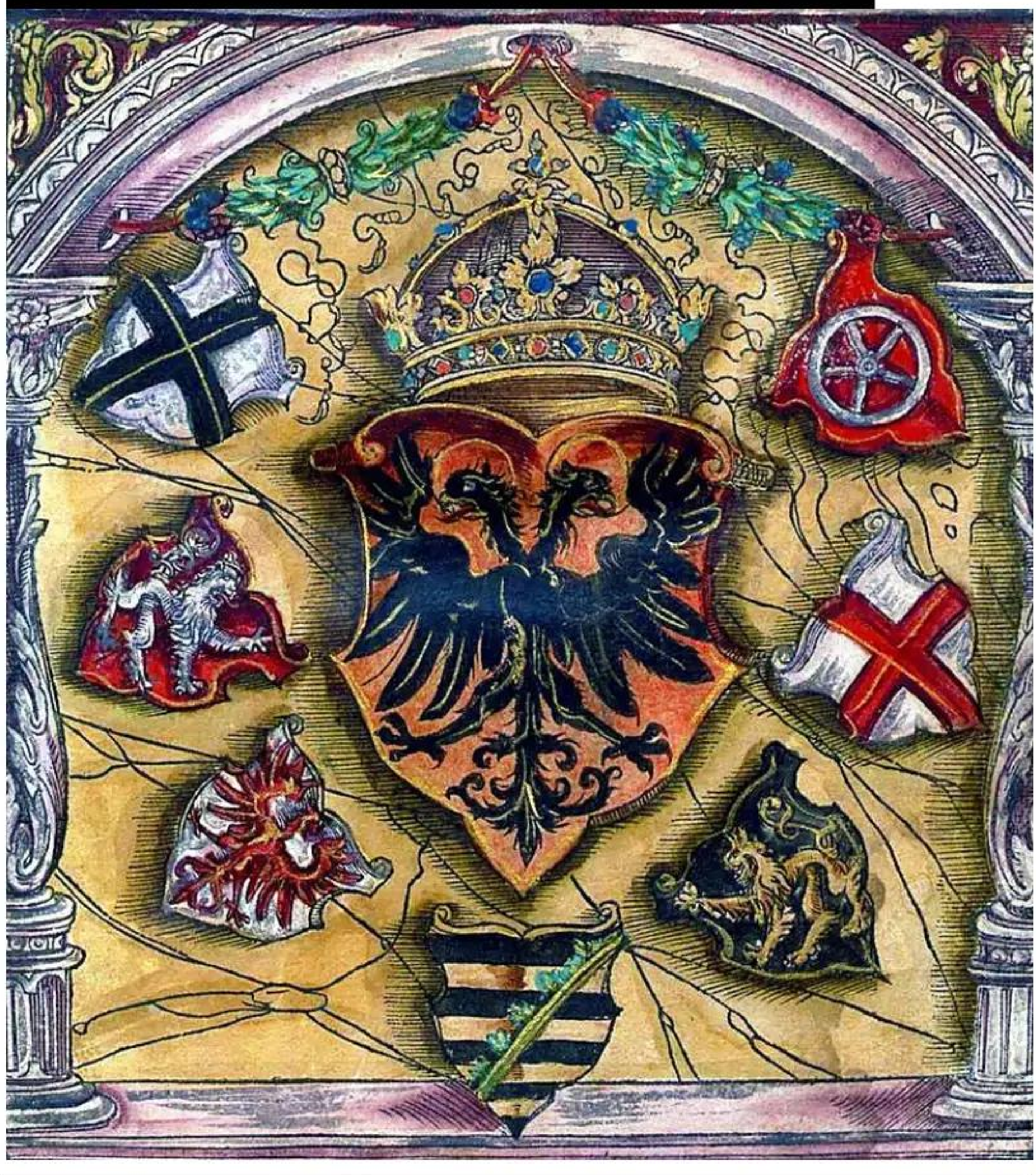
For many years the empire existed without an emperor, so a strict set of rules was developed to ensure this did not happen again

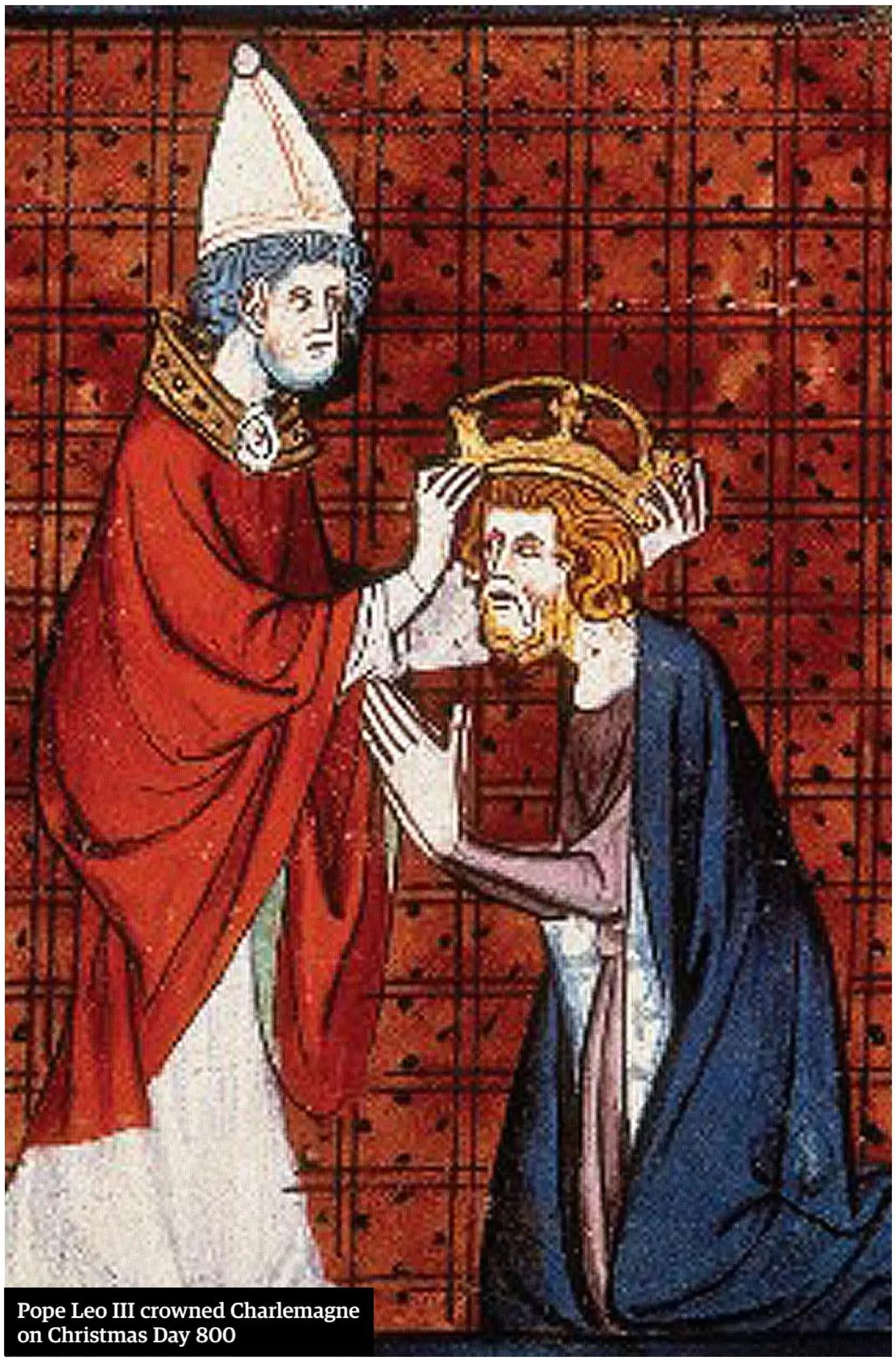
Initially, the role of Holy Roman emperor was chosen entirely by the pope in a mainly political move to protect the Church. Until the 13th century, elections for the emperor were rare, and the pontiff would make his decision based on an array of factors such as religious piety, empire size and relation to the previous ruler. However, without strict guidelines to follow, this did lead to large stretches of time where no formal emperor was crowned – for instance, from 924 to 962 there was no emperor in the West.

From the 13th century, a more formal process was put in place for elections. The power to elect the emperor was given to a select number of imperial princes, called prince-electors for their role. Some of them were secular – the king of Bohemia, count Palatine of the Rhine, duke of Saxony and the margrave of Brandenburg – and these positions were gained by birthright. However the spiritual electors – prince-archbishop of Mainz, Cologne and Trier – were elected by cathedral chapters. Therefore, the men who chose the emperor were a mix of kingly blood and religious leaders. These electors would choose the 'king of the Romans' as the designated heir, who would then go on to be crowned by the pope, which by that point was more of a formality.

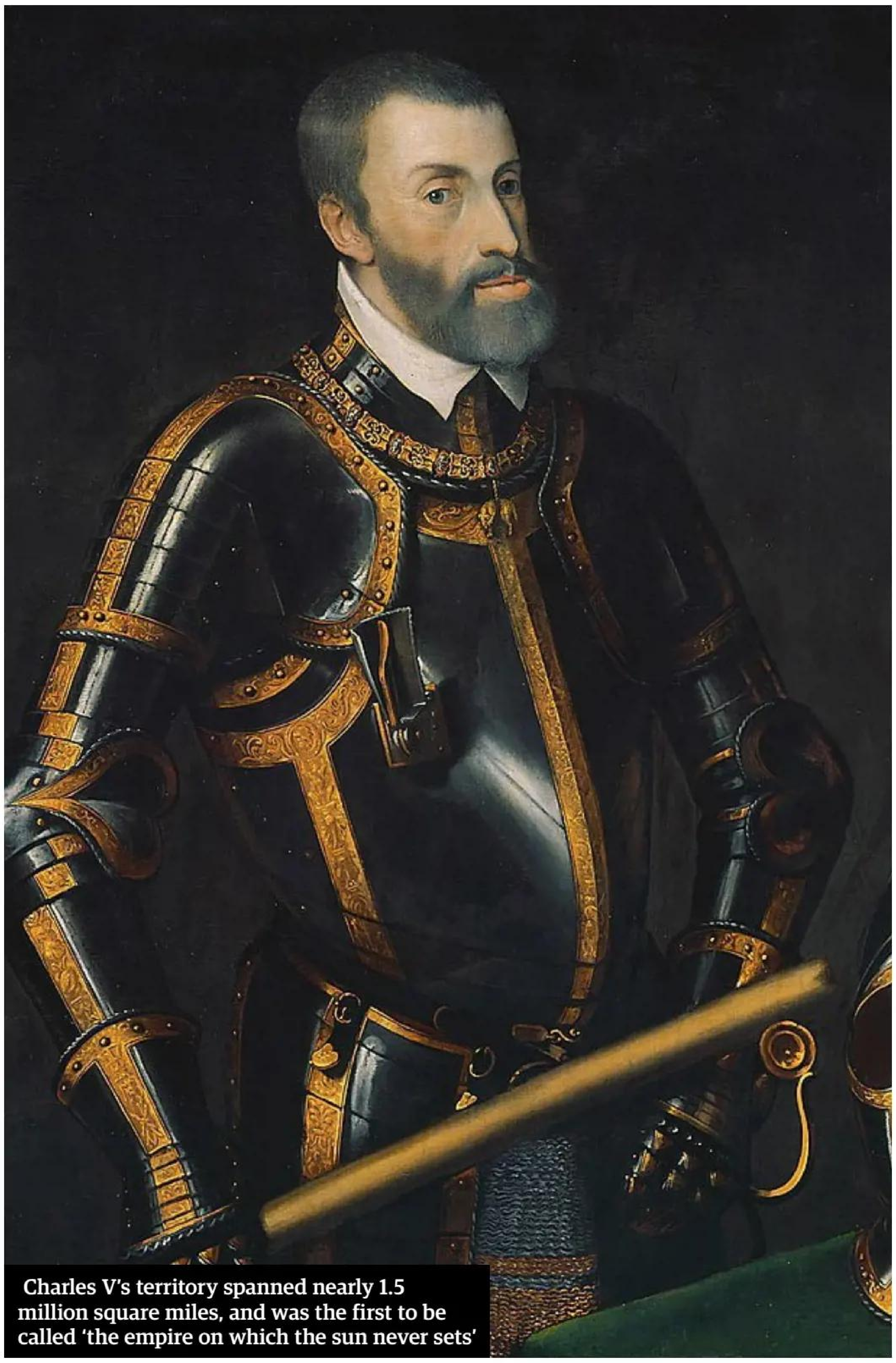
In 1356, the Golden Bull decree set these rules formally and introduced the principle of majority voting, so four out of seven possible votes would be enough to elect the new king. It also introduced more peculiar traditions, such as if the electors were unable to make a decision within 30 days, they would be given only bread and water until they could. The papacy was not considered at all in this election, and he was expected to agree with the electors without question.


Charlemagne, as a devout Catholic, was dedicated to his relationship with the papacy


This represents the seven prince electors surrounding the coat of arms of the Holy Roman emperor



Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne on Christmas Day 800



Charles V's territory spanned nearly 1.5 million square miles, and was the first to be called 'the empire on which the sun never sets'

It seemed that Charles V was the last emperor to really enforce any sort of central authority as doing so after his rule would have been nigh-on impossible. That said, there were those who still believed in the idea of the empire – thinking that its mere existence would prevent princely dominance in Europe.

However, the final years of the empire became a struggle for dominance between the two most significant German powers – Austria and Prussia. The two powers came to blows in the Seven Years' War, a global conflict that originated from a battle over the province of Silesia. But it was the French Revolution that truly struck the final nail in the coffin. As far back as the 13th century, the French monarchy had had its eyes on the territories of the empire, but had been largely unsuccessful in absorbing them. What France really needed was a strong and ambitious leader with the will and know-how to finally grab them. And in the wake of the French Revolution, they got what they were looking for: Napoleon Bonaparte.

The French emperor was sly in how he went about achieving his aim. He declared himself Charlemagne's heir, swearing to oust Francis II and absorb the Holy Roman Empire into his new order. Francis II wasn't a fool either, of course, and he decided it would be better if nobody wore his crown, rather than hand it over to his nemesis Napoleon, so he simply disbanded his realm and resigned on 6 August 1806. This move marked an end to over 1,000 years of existence of the Holy Roman Empire.

This is the official date given to the end of the Holy Roman Empire. But for many the question is not when the empire ended, but if it was ever truly an empire at all. As said before, one of the most famous quotes regarding the empire was spoken by Voltaire: "This agglomeration which was called and which still calls itself the Holy Roman Empire was in no way holy, nor Roman, nor an empire." This line has been quoted time and time again by historians and history enthusiasts alike when arguing whether or not the Holy Roman Empire even qualifies as an empire at all, and the debate still rages to this day.

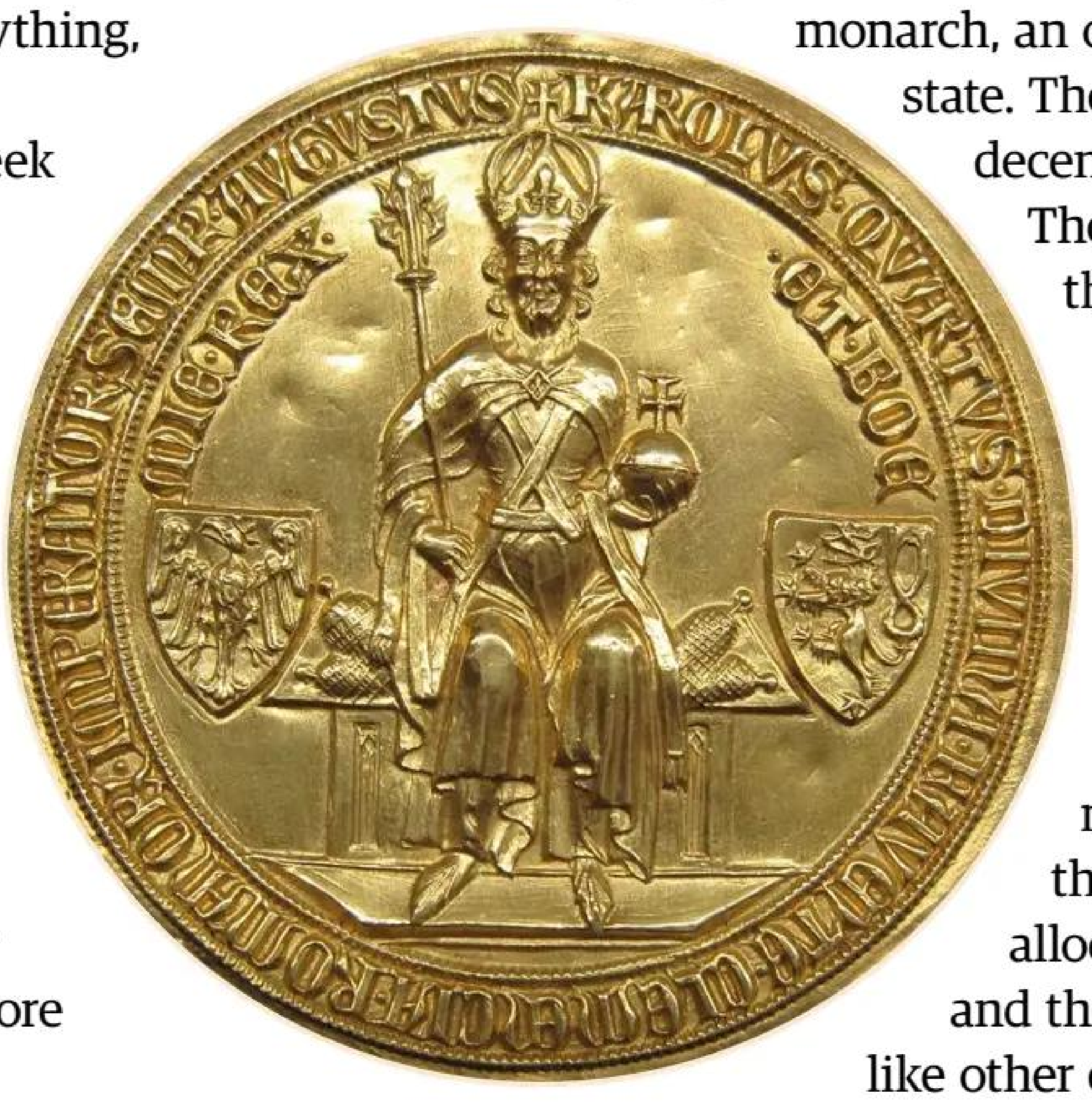
Concerning Voltaire's often-quoted statement, it's important to remember the context the man himself was talking from – Voltaire lived during the 18th century, when the empire was in rapid decline. He was also a Frenchman who was part of the Enlightenment movement, so it is of little surprise that he would see the empire as a dusty old relic of the past, impeding the advancement of modern society.

First of all, he claimed that it was not holy. Although the word 'holy' did take some time to come into the title of the empire, this element was actually vitally important to it – the emperor's position was regarded as the guardian of the pope and defender of Christianity. However, of course in reality this did not go so smoothly. The emperors and popes had disagreements that led to the papacy becoming redundant to the empire's politics. However, the term 'holy' was not only linked to the pope, but the idea that the

© Getty Images

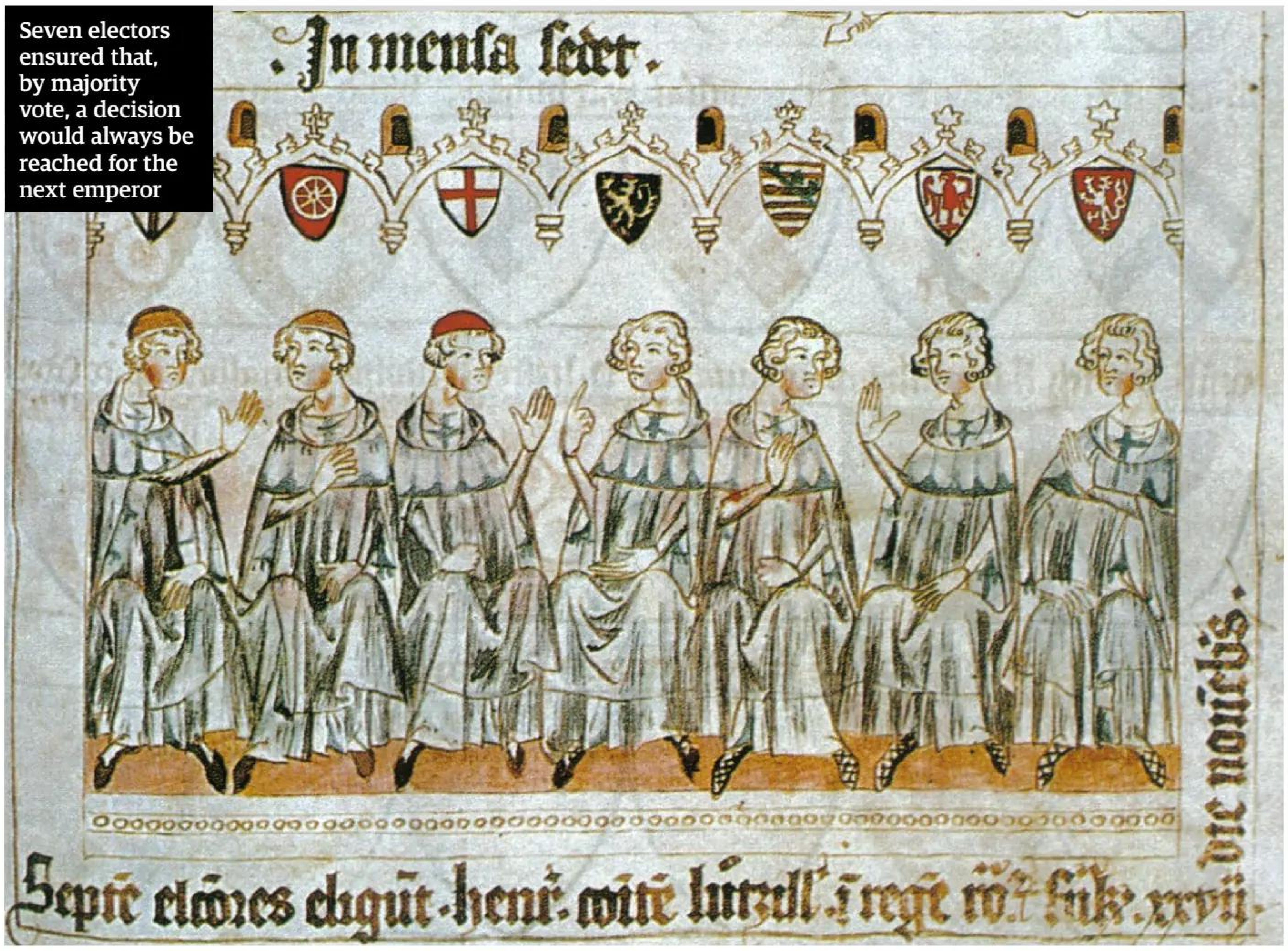
empire was not a monarchy, but a holy empire with a divine mission that didn't need approval from the pontiff. In fact, the world 'holy' didn't enter the empire's title until the pope was already distanced from it, and the addition of this word was intended to further it from the papacy.

Secondly, Voltaire claimed it was not Roman. This seems cut and dry – it appears on the surface that the empire wasn't Roman at all, but German. It certainly wasn't a direct continuation of the Roman Empire, and, if anything, the 'Roman' aspect of the empire came from the Greek Eastern Roman Empire. Charlemagne's link to the ancient Roman Empire was weak at best, but the title of Roman emperor was one that still held great prestige and gave him elevated status. Initially the empire really was viewed as a continuation of Ancient Rome, but over time it became steadily more and more German.



The crucial term, empire, is a difficult one to pin down. There is no universally accepted definition of the word, so this has made it difficult to categorically confirm if the Holy Roman Empire qualifies as one. Interestingly enough, the Roman Empire was believed to be the last and greatest of its kind. While today we regard many different empires co-existing at the same time – the British, the Spanish, the French – the Holy Roman Empire was, for a great amount of its existence and in official documents, simply known as 'The Empire'. In Christian thought at the time, multiple empires simply could not exist all at once, so the continuation of the Roman Empire was not only *an* empire but *the* empire. The only empire in the entire world.

Today's standards are different, and the Holy Roman Empire certainly does not strictly follow the traditional view of an empire: an extensive group of states or countries ruled over by a single monarch, an oligarchy, or a sovereign state. The issues here lay in how decentralised the empire was. They did have an emperor, but the regional princes often had more power over their individual territories than the emperor did. Because of its incredibly unique set-up, comparing any other 'empire' in history to the Holy Roman one is nigh-on impossible. Due to the complex roles and powers allocated to princes, vassals and the emperor himself, it is not like other empires where the power wielded can be represented by one man at the top of a pyramid. There wasn't a single chain of command, and even the imperial princes did not have the same powers and prestige as each others. The various states created their own titles, such as archduke in Austria, and Prussia grew so powerful that it became a kingdom in its own right with its own kings, and the empire didn't really have the power to stop it. One can understand why Voltaire would claim this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Seven electors ensured that, by majority vote, a decision would always be reached for the next emperor

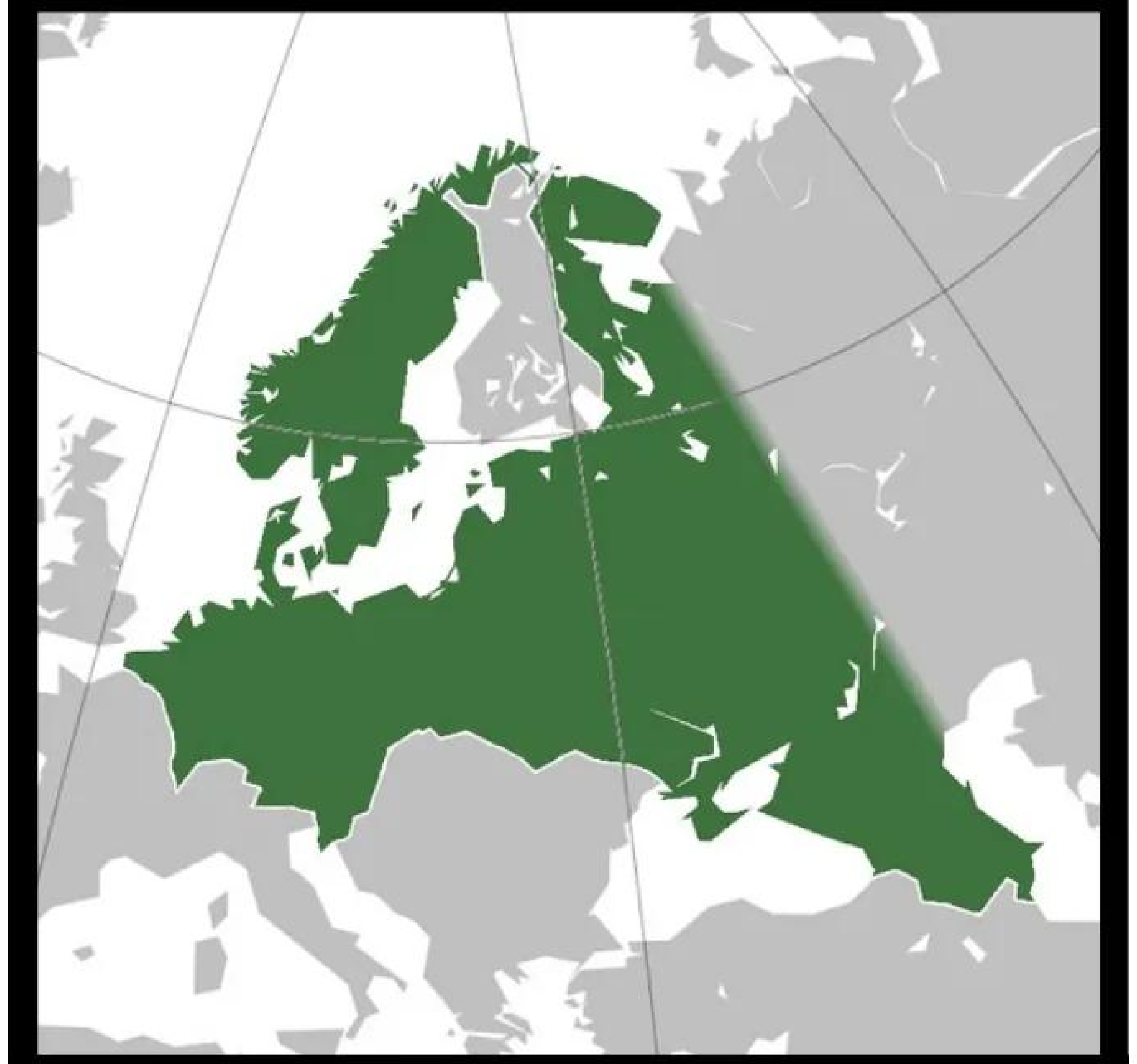
"It appears on the surface that the empire was not Roman at all, but German"

AN EMPIRE OF INFLUENCE

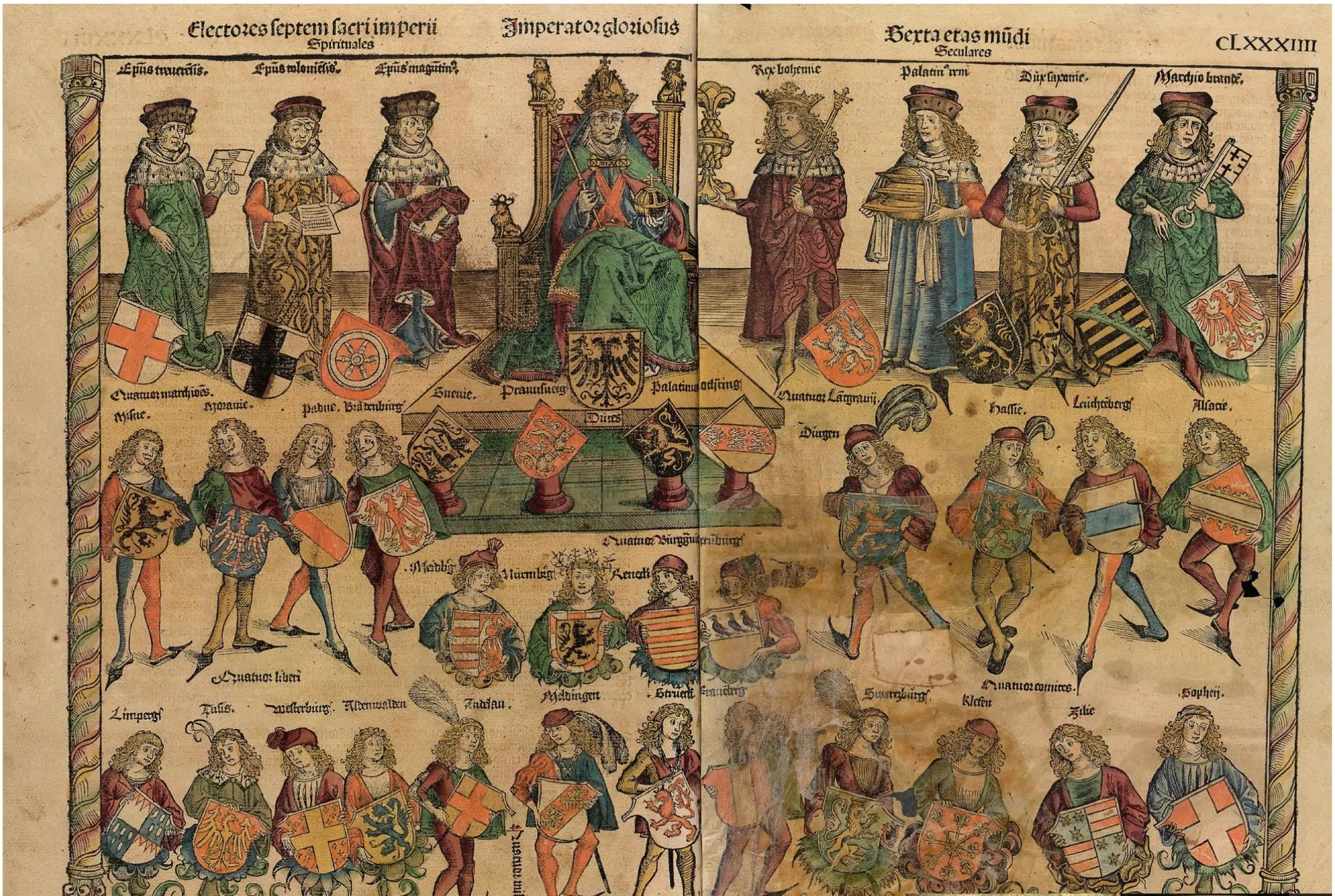
The Holy Roman Empire was unique, but that didn't stop it playing a crucial role in the history of other nations

Because of the unique nature of the Holy Roman Empire, it is difficult to equate it to any other nation in history. This is due to its nature as a collection of different nations, and the role of emperor being more a symbolic than literal one. The Holy Roman Empire itself worked as a kind of federation, where hundreds of different nations fought for power within it. Because of this, some similarities have been made between the Holy Roman Empire and the European Union, as both comprise a group of disparate countries, brought together under a loose umbrella term.

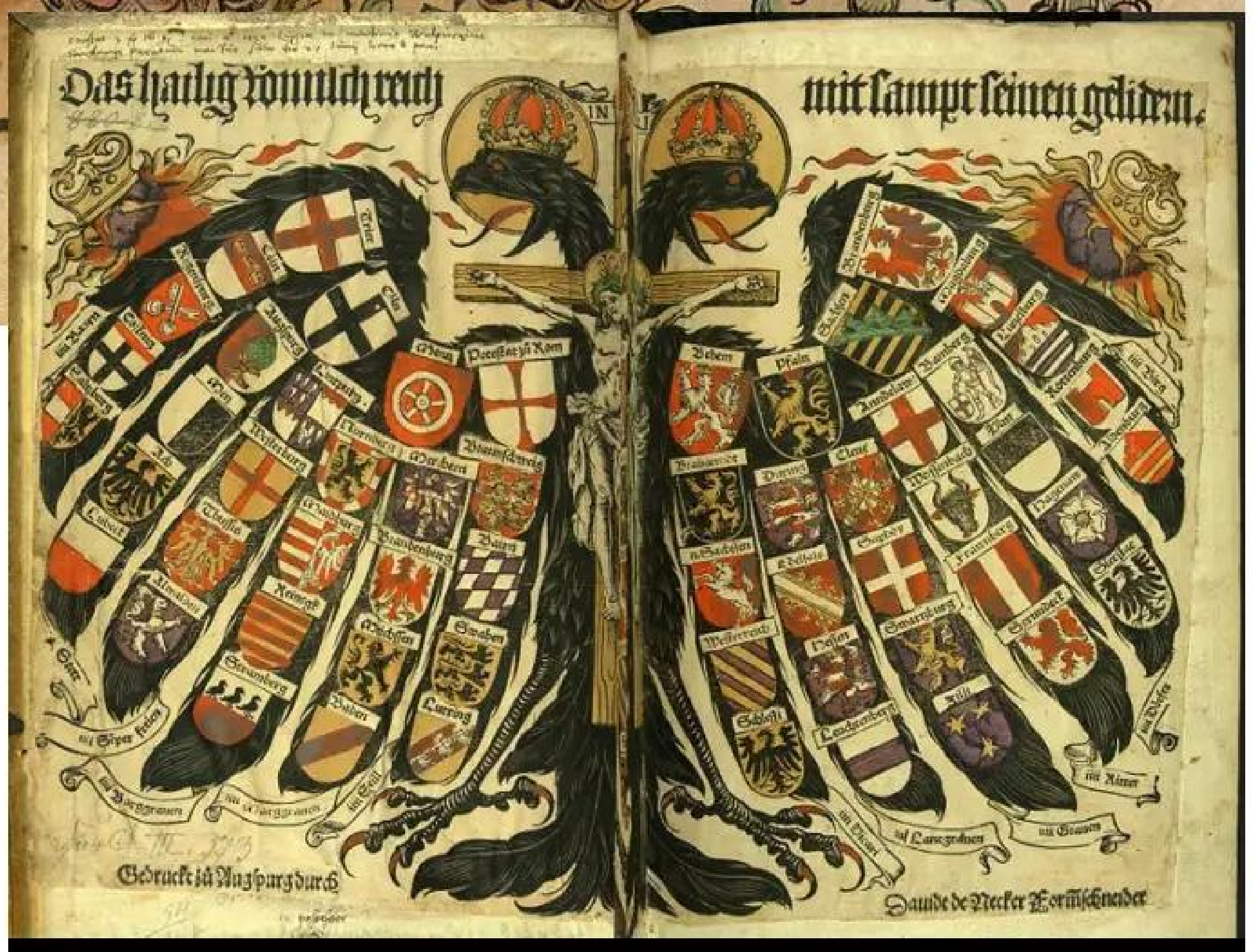
The greatest legacy of the Holy Roman Empire is likely its ability to unite a lot of different populations of varied countries and tribes under one central government. The origins of modern Germany, for example, can be traced back to the Holy Roman Empire. When all the German territories were united in 1871 it was dubbed the Reich. This idea of the German Reich (or 'realm') continued in 1933 to 1945 when Adolf Hitler wished to continue the legacy of this German empire with the Third Reich, thereby dubbing the Holy Roman Empire the First Reich (or German Empire). The full term "Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation" was used in 1474 and sowed the seeds of belief that it was the destiny of the Germans to rule the empire of Christendom. This belief, of course, would have huge implications for all of Europe and indeed the world, leading into the First and Second World Wars.



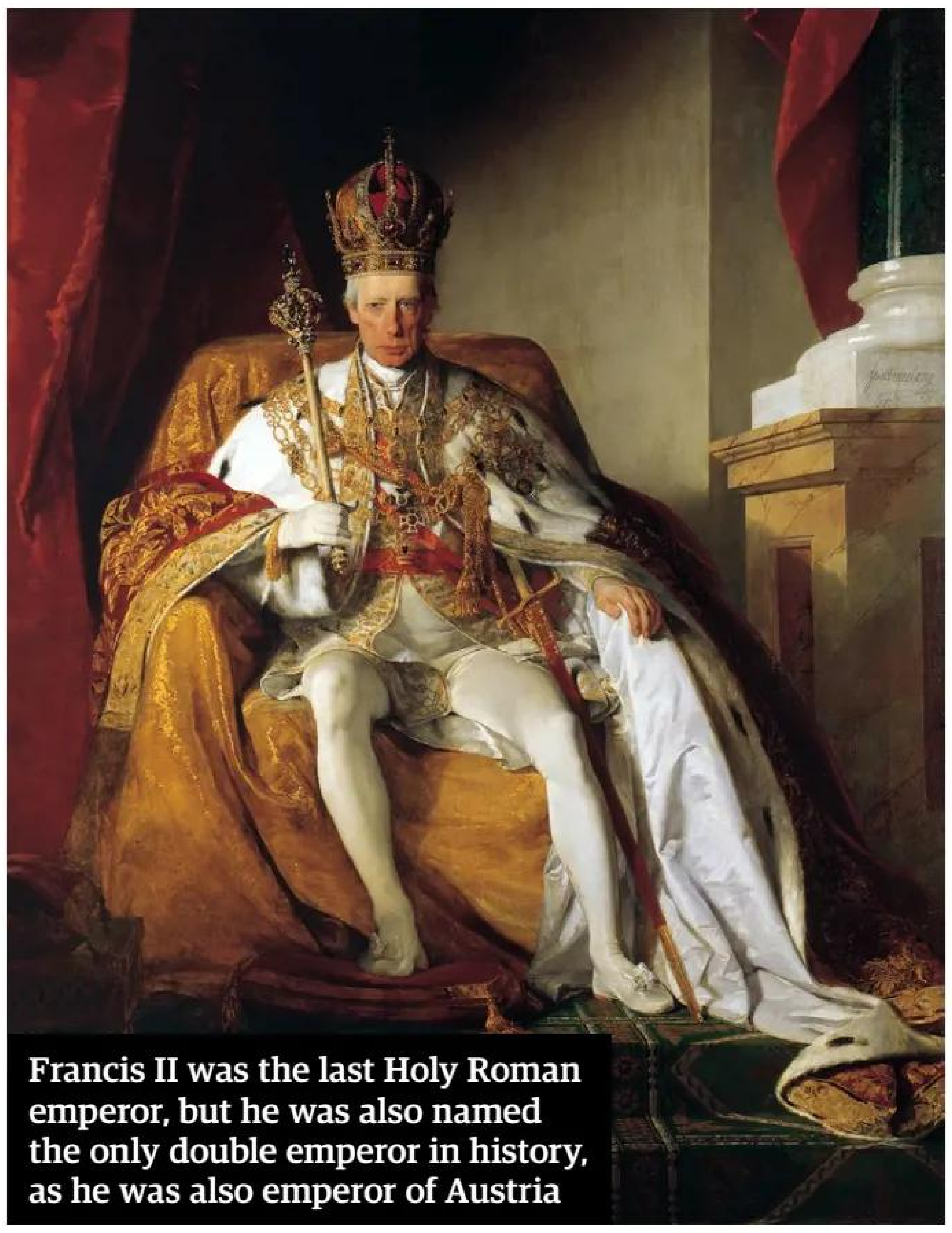
The planned boundaries of the Greater Germanic Reich were intended to mostly revert back to those of the Holy Roman Empire



This depicts the complicated make-up of the empire, with the Holy Roman emperor sitting in the throne



This image displays the coat of arms of the individual states within the wings of the double-headed eagle of the Holy Roman Empire



Francis II was the last Holy Roman emperor, but he was also named the only double emperor in history, as he was also emperor of Austria

patchwork of jurisdictions that existed in his day did not qualify as an empire. However, the emperor did rule over a large region of different territories. But again, he ruled these territories separately, and attempts to bring them together were met with resistance and failure.

Having said that, if we go back to before Voltaire's time, the Holy Roman Empire does appear much more imperial. In essence, an empire is a wide range of places ruled jointly and for this it does fit the bill. The empire was made up of separate kingdoms, and was for most of the Middle Ages one of the most powerful states in Europe – perhaps even the most powerful. To disregard this important history because of its unique set-up and later breakdown seems to ignore the immense power wielded by the empire during its 'golden years'.

The empire began when central Europe was a feudal, agricultural society, largely with one unifying religion, and it watched it transform into an urban, religiously diverse and centralised one. It was this transformation that seemed to put an end to the empire once and for all. It wasn't able to survive the massive changes in European society, perhaps due to its unique structure. Because of this it became obsolete, but this does not mean it wasn't an empire once.

In fact, for a long time it was regarded as the only empire, and certainly deserves its place in the history of the empires, uniqueness aside. The impact and importance of the empire, even after its death, continued to be felt throughout Europe into the modern age.

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THE NORTH SEA EMPIRE

1,000 years ago, a young Viking warrior became king of England. No one at the time could have expected how remarkable his reign would be

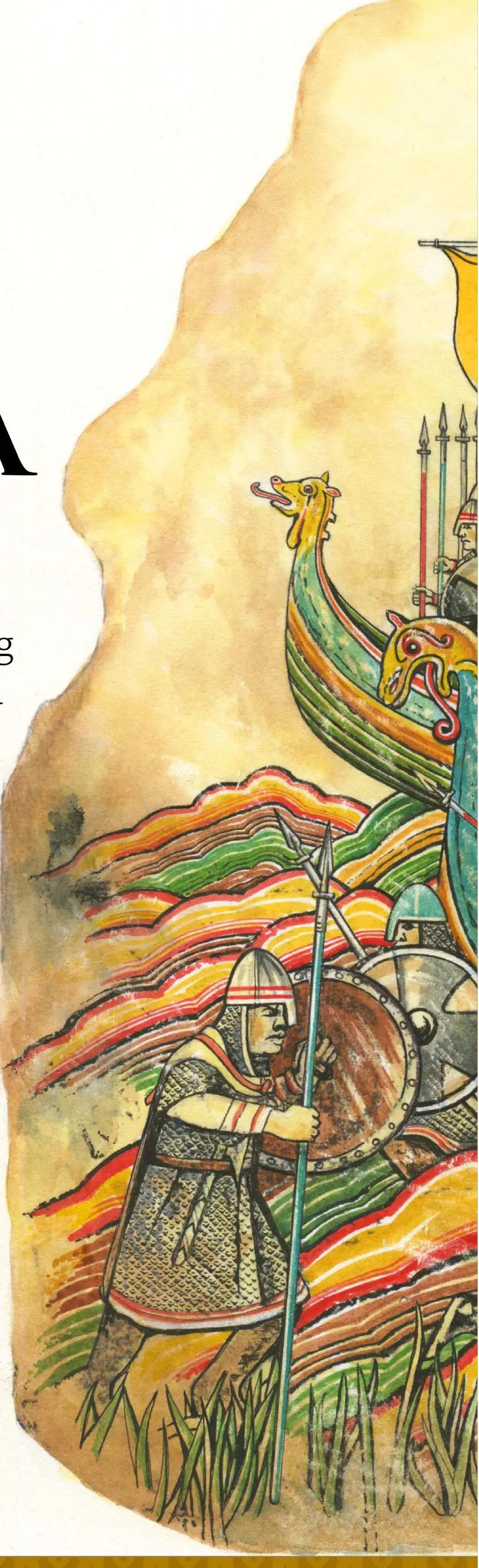
Written by WB Bartlett

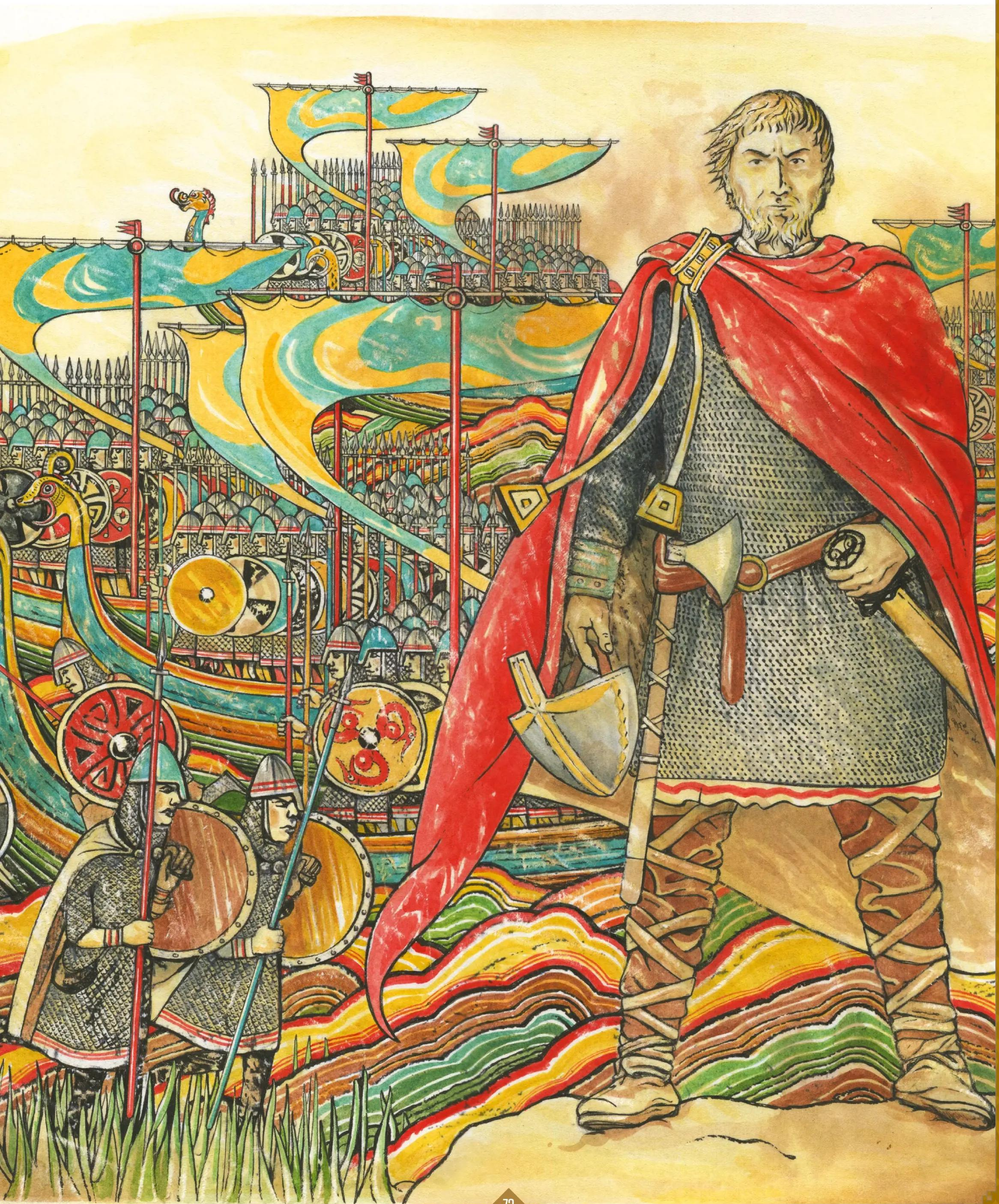
Most famous now for his futile efforts to turn back the encroaching tide on the seashore, the life of Cnut was extraordinary. As well as being a strong, reliable supporter of the Church, he was also an archetypal Viking raider. Forming part of a dynamic marital alliance with his wife, Emma, he was also accused of the murder of his brother-in-law, Ulf. As well as ruling England and Denmark, he was also for a short time king of Norway. His government of what has been called an 'Empire of the North' was a unique achievement, setting Cnut apart as a remarkable man and an outstanding ruler.

Cnut's roots were in Denmark – his great-grandfather, Gorm the Old, was the founder of the Jelling dynasty in Jutland. Gorm was a formidable pagan warrior, but his son, Harald Bluetooth, became an enthusiastic Christian ruler. Harald was involved in a bitter civil war with his own son, the renowned Sweyn Forkbeard, a conflict that ended with him fleeing the country and dying shortly afterwards in exile. Sweyn took over and won a reputation as a ruthless and ferocious Viking raider, frequently launching attacks on Britain and Ireland and elsewhere.

Cnut, the son of Sweyn Forkbeard, was probably born in around 995, though no one knows that for sure. The chronicles of the time are equally silent about the first 18 years of Cnut's life and it is not until 1013 that we find him first mentioned in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. But in that year he accompanied Sweyn on what was supposed to be the climactic campaign in the battle to conquer England. After several decades of raiding, increasing in scale all the time and often only ended by the payment of what later became known as 'Danegeld', Sweyn sensed that England was fatally wounded and, like a hungry predator, moved in for the kill.

He found support for his ambitions from the region of the Danelaw (around the East Midlands of modern England), and Northumbria also soon submitted to him. Moving into southern England, the defence against his forces quickly collapsed. The English king, Æthelred II ('the Unready')

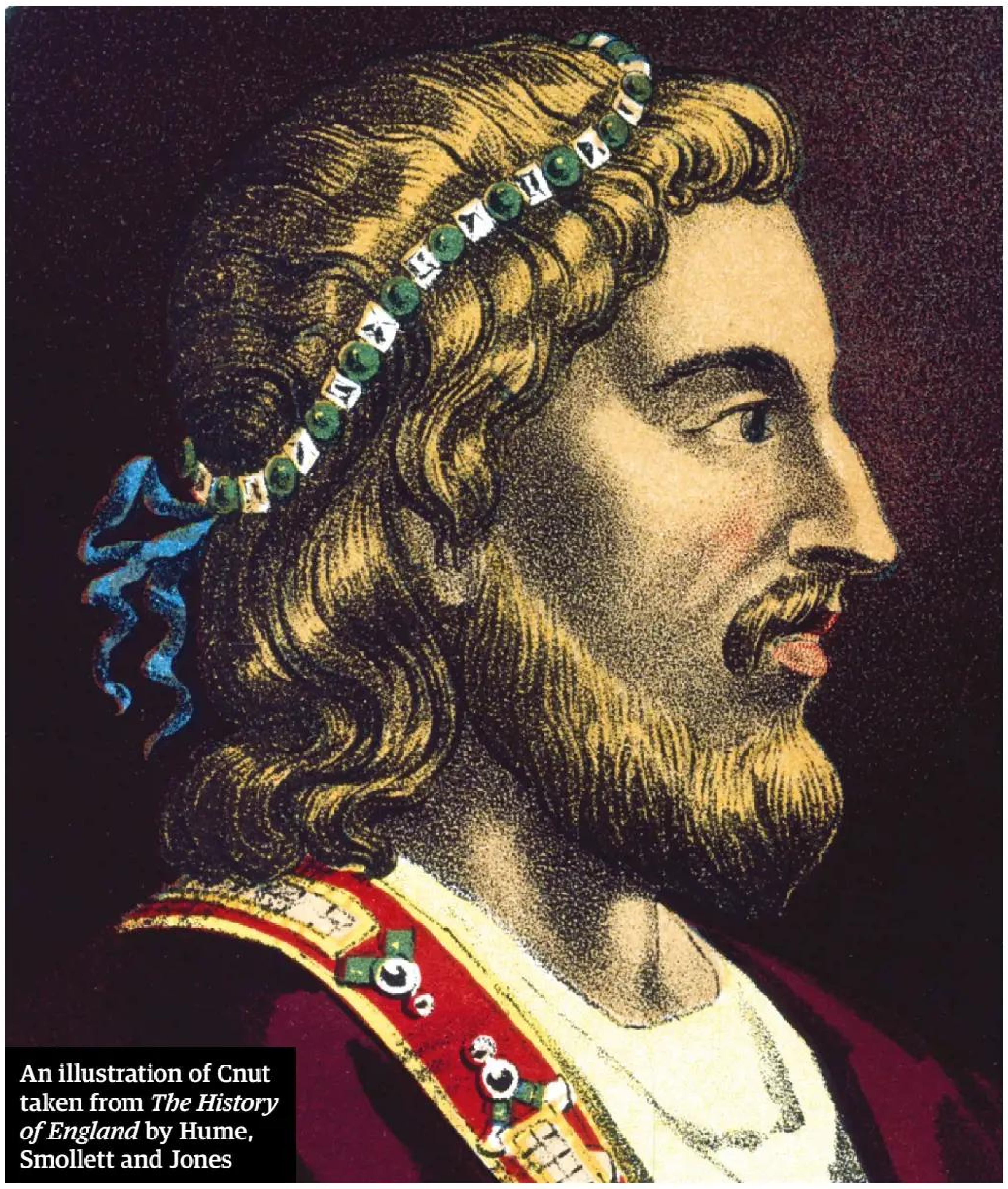




soon fled the country with his wife Emma and their children, Edward and Alfred. England, it seemed, had fallen. King Æthelred would later be painted as something of a pantomime villain, incompetent and cowardly in equal measure. It was a very harsh assessment given the enormous challenges that he had faced, but it could not be doubted that his reign had apparently ended in spectacular failure.

But just then, as if by a miracle, Sweyn died before he had been made king. Cnut was not with him at the time, having stayed in the Danelaw while Sweyn had moved into southern England. Shortly after, Cnut was badly caught out by a surprise attack on his camp launched by English forces. Æthelred returned from exile and Cnut, barely escaping with his life, fled to Denmark - but before departing, he left behind a group of hostages minus their ears and noses. This was Cnut the Viking in action.

England's respite was short-lived. In 1015, Cnut returned with 200 ships, sailing via the 'mouth of the Frome' into Dorset. This saw the beginning of a brutal war for the control of England between Cnut and Edmund Ironside, the son of the now-dying King Æthelred. Both were very young warriors, in their early 20s, and the fighting that followed through several battles at Penselwood, Sherston and Otford was bloody and violent. Cnut also laid siege to London and it was a brutal contest that was fought out over a period of a year and more.



An illustration of Cnut taken from *The History of England* by Hume, Smollett and Jones

The last decisive battle took place at Ashingdon, Essex, in October 1016, and it ended in a crushing victory for Cnut. Edmund survived the battle and a deal was struck that left him with Wessex but Cnut with the rest of England. The deal did not survive for long because on 30 November 1016 Edmund very conveniently died, leaving Cnut as the undisputed king of all England.

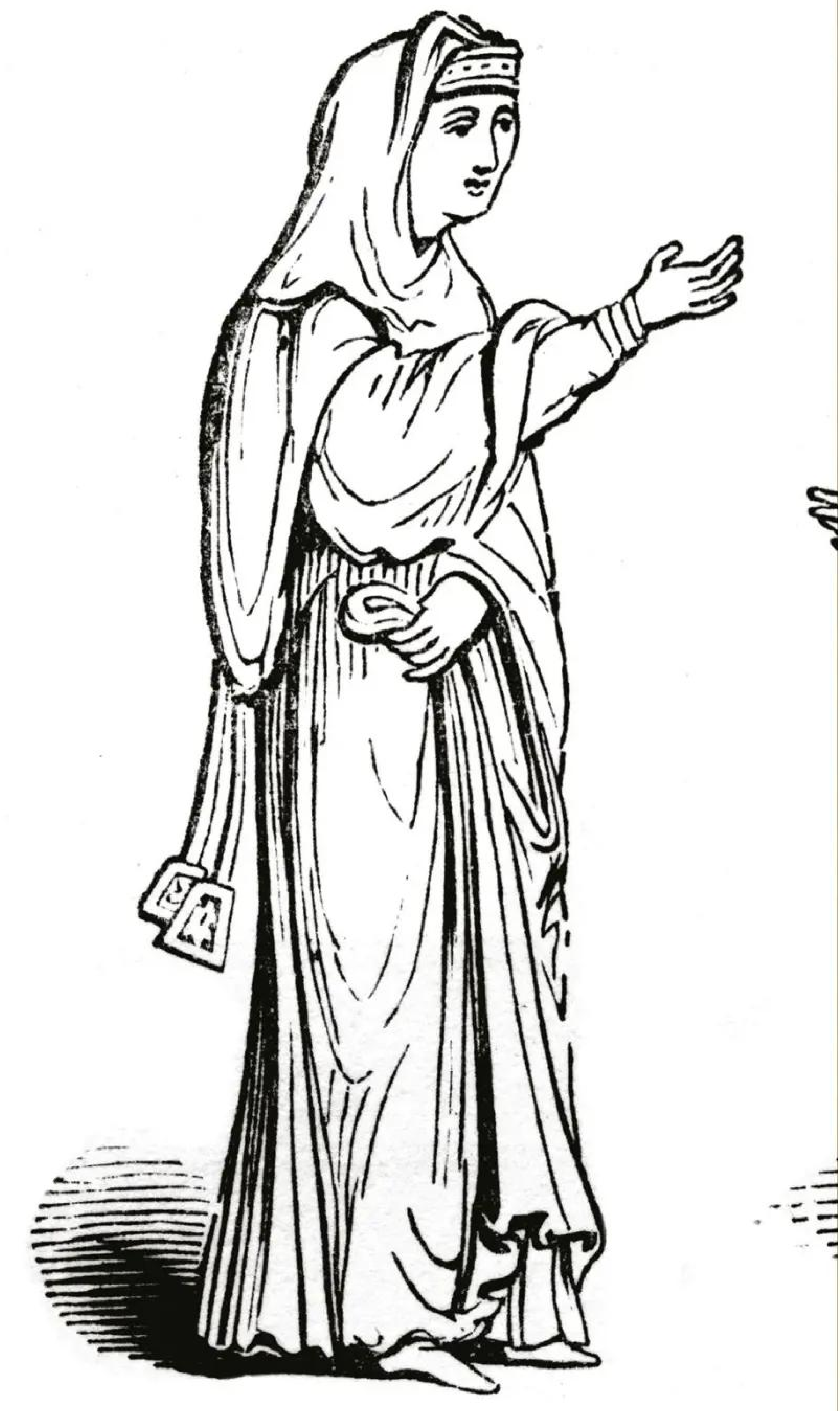
> "It was a brutal contest that was fought out over a long period of a year and more"

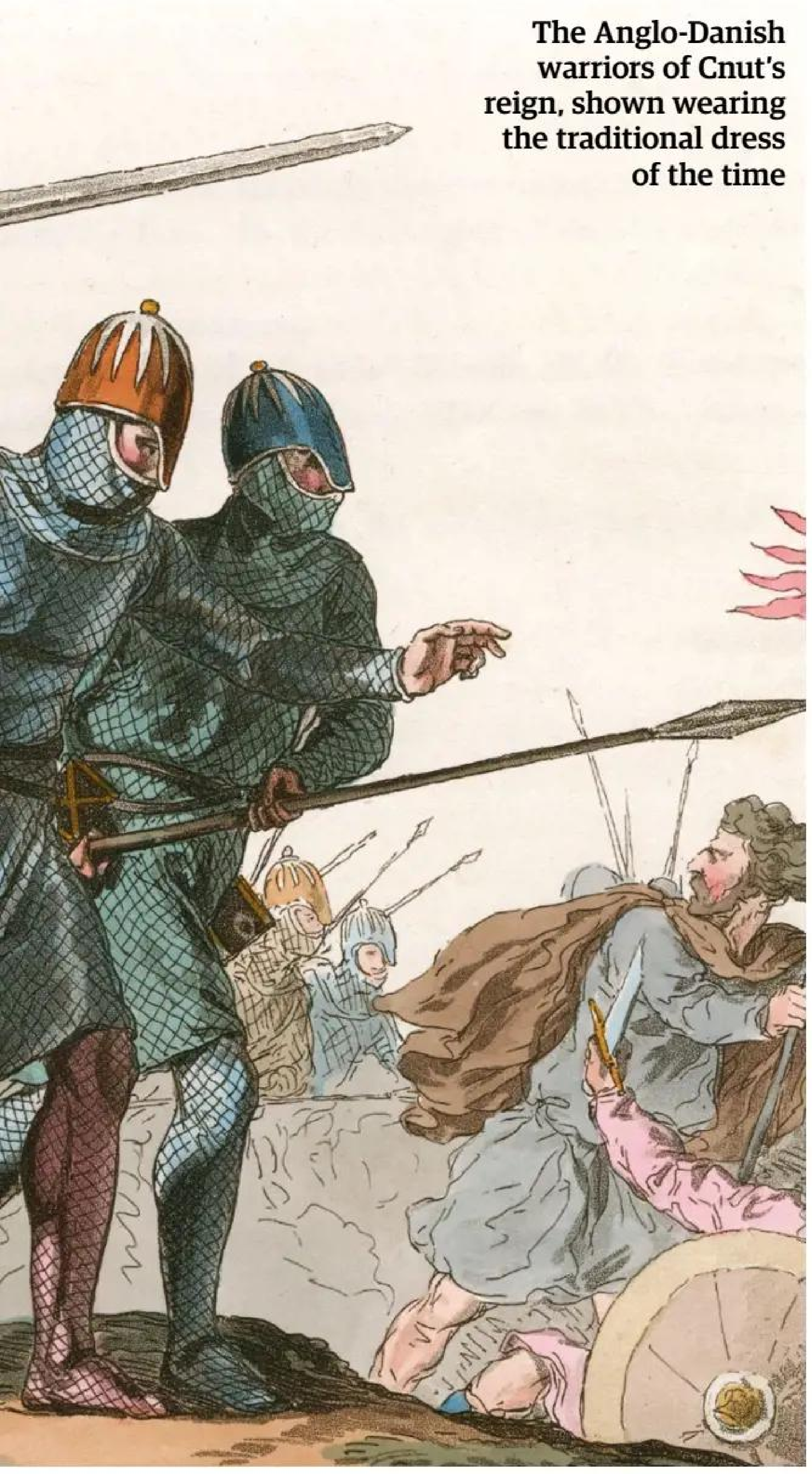
At the time, it was likely that the people of England were filled with trepidation at these developments. Given the ruthless nature of Viking raids on the country, there was a real chance that the new King would milk England for all it was worth, and early signs did little to dispel that impression. Within a year, Cnut was ruthlessly removing those who he felt were plotting against him including Eadric Streona, Earl of Mercia, whose treachery to the old regime had become a byword for duplicity and untrustworthiness.

Then in 1018 he raised the highest Danegeld payment yet; £10,500 from London and £72,000 from the rest of England - massive amounts in the context of the times. But there was a subtext to this move: Cnut's intention was to use the money to pay off Viking raiders that he no longer had a use for now that the war had been won. This would allow him to govern as he wanted to.

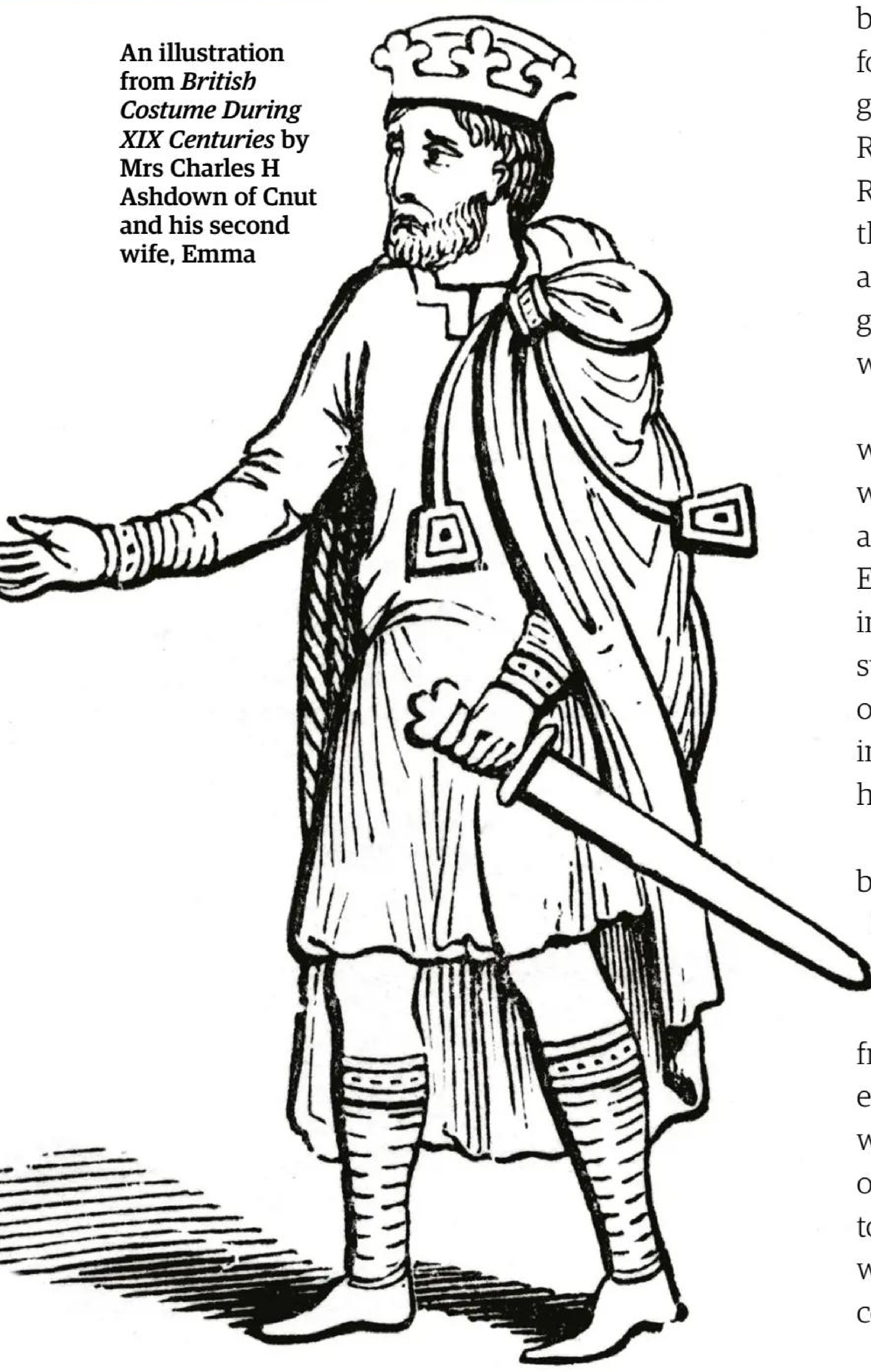
The first sign that there was something to this young man other than the attributes of a rip-roaring Viking raider occurred at around the same time. At a Parliament at Oxford, Cnut adopted the laws of the late King Edgar the Peaceful, seen as one of the greatest of all English monarchs. Edgar's reign had been perceived as a golden age, a time of peace and prosperity. This was a canny move by the Viking king.

It followed another notable step when he married Emma, widow of the late king Æthelred. Emma had two children from her first marriage; Edward (later King Edward the Confessor) and Alfred. Cnut also had two children from a previous relationship with Ælfgifu of Northampton, named Sweyn and Harold (later Harold Harefoot, a king of England). Soon after her marriage to Cnut, Emma gave birth to another son, Harthacnut.





The Anglo-Danish warriors of Cnut's reign, shown wearing the traditional dress of the time



An illustration from *British Costume During XIX Centuries* by Mrs Charles H Ashdown of Cnut and his second wife, Emma

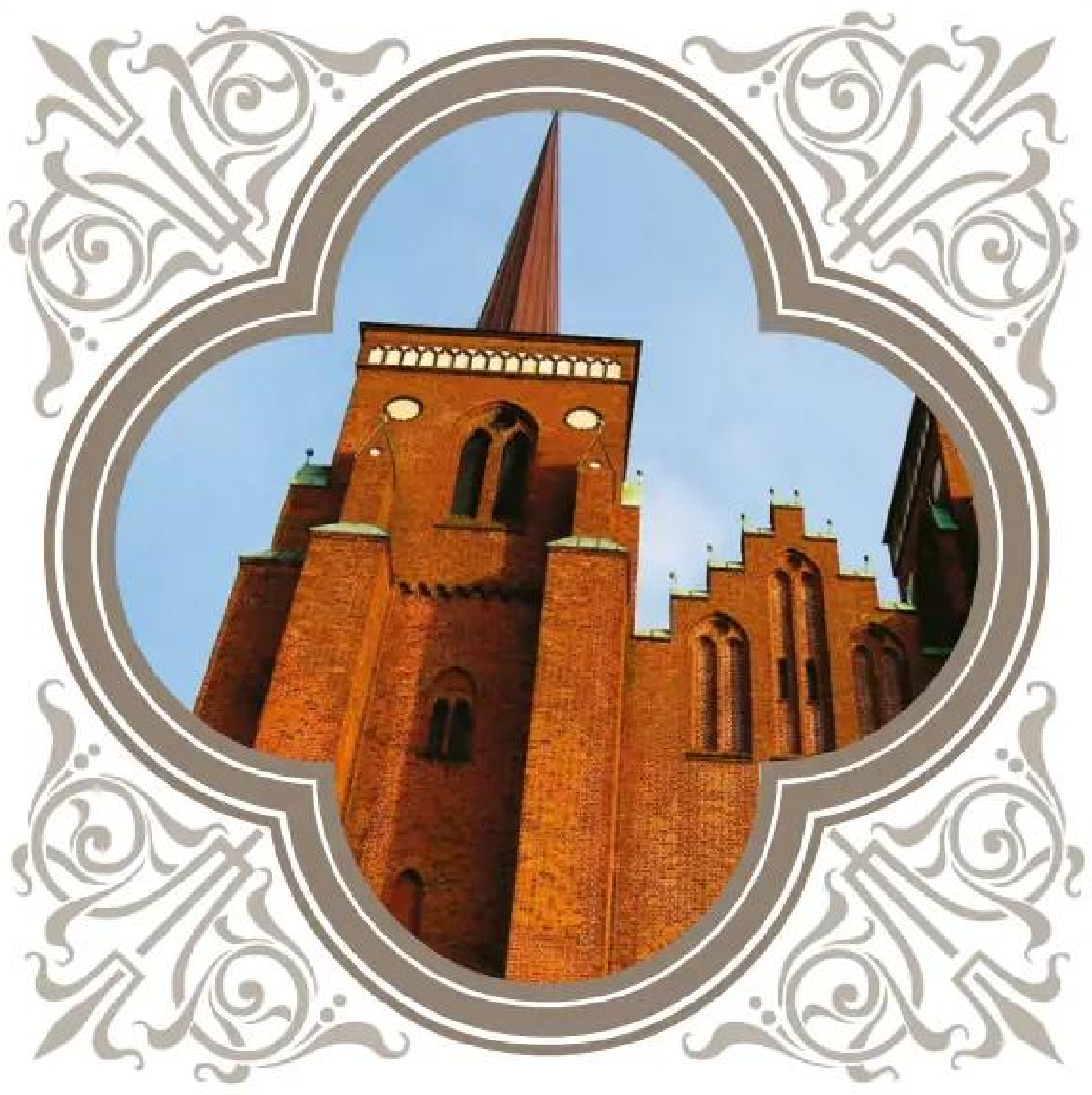
The death, soon after, of Cnut's childless elder brother, Harald, left Denmark open and Cnut soon installed himself as king there, seemingly with little opposition. Cnut, at around the same time, strengthened his hold on England by the judicious appointment of strong supporters in positions of authority in the country. Most prominent among these was Earl Godwin, who Cnut appointed as his representative in the crucial sub-kingdom of Wessex. Godwin would marry the sister of Cnut's brother-in-law. They would have a number of children, including Harold, who would himself become king of England and end his life, allegedly, with an arrow in his eye, at the now-infamous Battle of Hastings in 1066.

Norway too had once been part of the empire of Sweyn Forkbeard, Cnut's father. However, it had not remained so for long before a rebellion there threw off Danish rule. The beneficiary of that uprising and the current king of Norway was a man named Olaf Haraldsson. Olaf allied himself with the king of Sweden and together they raised an army with a view to attacking Denmark. Cnut got together an army of his own to face up to the threat. The two forces clashed in southern Sweden at the Battle of Helgeå. It was an indecisive confrontation, but Cnut succeeded in hanging on to Denmark.

Shortly after the ruthless elimination of his brother-in-law, Ulf, in Roskilde Cathedral, which followed on soon after, Cnut undertook perhaps the greatest mission of his life when he journeyed to Rome to be present at the coronation of the Holy Roman Emperor, Conrad II. To be in attendance at this ceremony was a great mark of recognition for a man who was effectively a Viking king. It made a great impression on many European statesmen as well as Cnut's own people.

Perhaps the most significant part of Cnut's reign was the way in which he built close relationships with the Church. He was a generous patron of a number of religious establishments in both England and Denmark. He also appointed allies into key positions of influence in the Church, such as when Æthelnoth was made archbishop of Canterbury in 1020. This helped to build his influence and his reputation and further strengthen his position.

However, the question of Norway was unfinished business as far as Cnut was concerned. Following his return from the indecisive battle at Helgeå, King Olaf's position had become increasingly fragile back in Norway. It was then a very fragmented country with a number of regions, especially those positioned in the wild north that were virtually ungovernable. Cnut took advantage of the significant wealth of England to make gifts to disaffected nobles in Norway. When he arrived with a massive army, the position of Olaf quickly collapsed totally.



The new Roskilde cathedral that stands on the site of Ulf's death

MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL

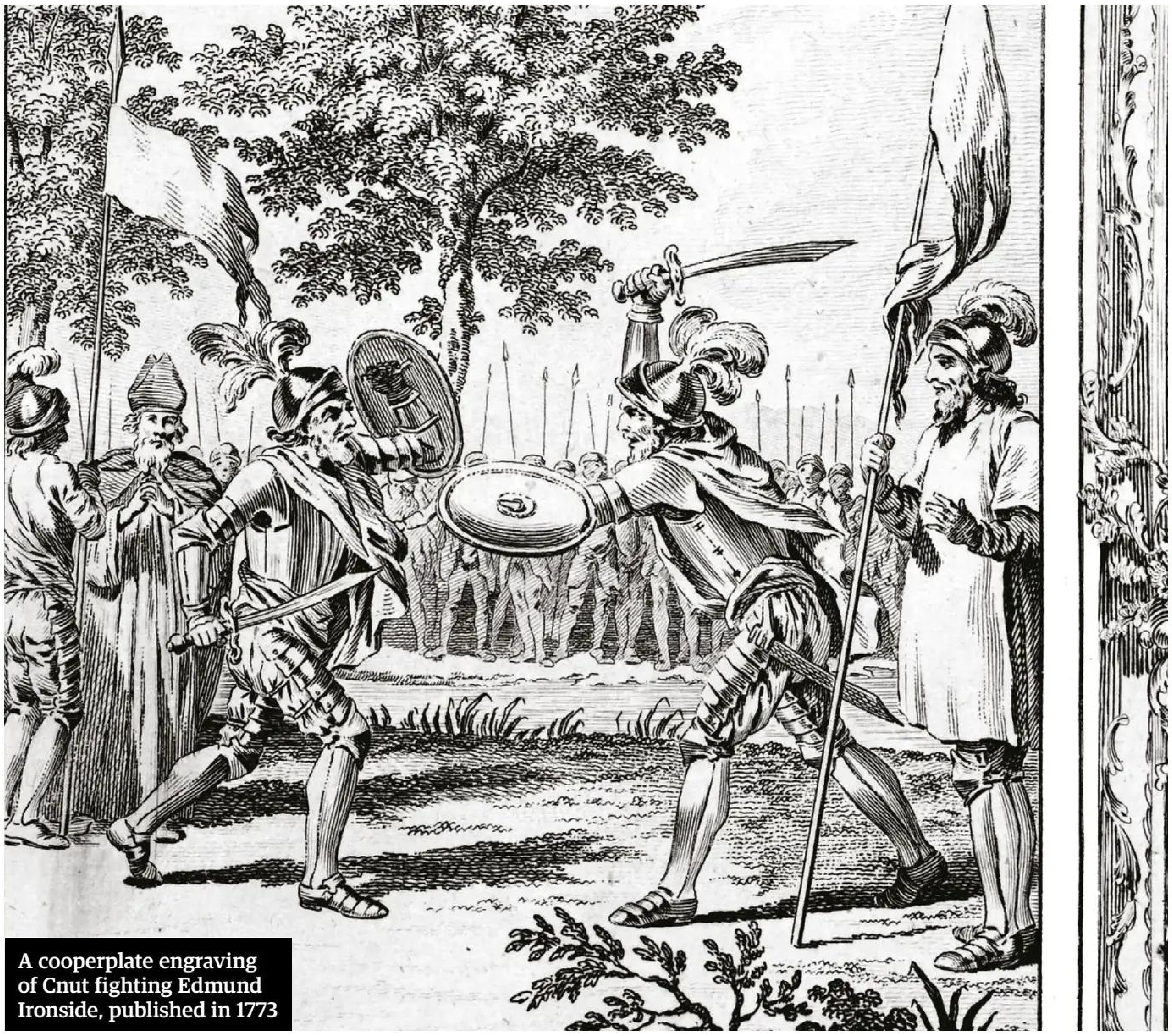
Cnut's involvement in the elimination of his brother-in-law

Although Cnut proved himself to be a strong and successful king, on several occasions during his reign he found himself at odds with his supporters, and even members of his extended family. Ulf was Cnut's brother-in-law, married to his sister Estrid Svendsdatter. In the lead-up to the Battle of Helgeå, there were suggestions that Ulf's loyalty was suspect. Cnut's young son Harthacnut was in Denmark as its nominal ruler and it seems that Ulf tried to dominate political affairs there in the absence of a powerful monarch resident in the country.

Nevertheless, Ulf appears to have been with Cnut when he took part in the hard-fought battle at Helgeå. After, they returned to Denmark together to the royal capital, Roskilde. There was soon a family squabble, according to some accounts, over something as trivial as chess. However, it may though have been something more significant like a breakdown in trust between the two that led to Cnut's next action.

Clearly angered by something that had taken place, Cnut sent men to eliminate Ulf once and for all. They found him inside Roskilde Cathedral (though some accounts say Ulf was on the royal farm), not the imposing building that one sees now with the tombs of many of Denmark's later monarchs but a much humbler wooden 'stave' church of simple design and intimate size. While some men hesitated to carry out orders given the sacred nature of the place, one of them, Ivar White, had no such scruples and struck Ulf dead.

This un-Christian act must have created alarm and Cnut's ability to survive this incident with his reputation relatively intact speaks highly of his political skills. However, it would seem that his own sister was not prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt and her son Sweyn was sent into protective exile for the remainder of Cnut's life. Cnut paid large sums of money to Estrid to allow her to build a grander structure at Roskilde, perhaps as a way of salving a guilty conscience.



A cooperplate engraving of Cnut fighting Edmund Ironside, published in 1773

> “He was a lover of the sagas every bit as much as more traditional Scandinavian rulers had been before him”

Olaf was forced to flee for his life. He returned soon after in a vain attempt to reclaim the country. At his side was his half-brother Harald, who later – as Harald Hardrada (‘the Ruthless’) – was to become one of the most famous of all Vikings and would meet his end in a cataclysmic encounter at Stamford Bridge in Yorkshire in 1066. Olaf lost his life in the battle at Stiklestad. Olaf was a staunch Christian ruler and soon after his death was canonised. Saint Olaf would prove much more successful in death than King Olaf ever was in life.

But Cnut did not prove a success as king of Norway. He appointed his first wife, Ælfgifu, as his regent in the country along with their son, Sweyn. However, a disastrous famine undermined their position; this was a time of great suffering across much of the continent and not just in Scandinavia. Their rule was allegedly very harsh and there were a number of revolts that led to the collapse of Cnut’s regime there. Olaf’s son, Magnus, soon became king in his stead.

Norway was only ever a temporary part of Cnut’s empire. Perhaps the dispersed nature of the territories that Cnut ruled made them inherently hard to govern. Certainly the diversity of his subjects, and the relative ‘newness’ of all three core countries in it – England, Denmark and Norway – presented him with great challenges. It was a tough act for anyone to pull off and certainly there were indications that some of those around him, especially the sons who would have to run his territories after his death – and to a significant extent would be expected to do so when he was alive – were not up to the task, though there were as yet but young.

Cnut certainly had imperial pretensions. His visit to Rome made a great impact on him. He was so impressed at the grandeur and magnificence of the great Imperial Crown that Conrad II wore at his coronation that he had a replica made for himself. Letters back to England soon afterwards included several implicit imperial references, for example when Cnut ostentatiously described himself as “king of England, Denmark, Norway [not at the time conquered] and part of Sweden”. There was little doubt that Cnut had seen something of the magnificence and associated power that came from being an emperor that he took to modelling himself on one to a certain extent.

Yet, paradoxically, Cnut also became renowned for his humility. His great generosity to the Christian Church has already been mentioned, but his actions also won respect. On a visit to the north of England late in his reign, he walked five miles barefoot to visit the tomb of the revered Saint Cuthbert in Durham. Chroniclers of the time wrote of a man who was more monk than king. Although these attributes may have been exaggerated, as was common with the chroniclers of the time, this suggests a man who wanted to make a strong impression for his Christian acts.

This was an approach that was perhaps based as much on the political advantages that came from it as from any deeply held personal convictions. It made Cnut a ‘modern’ ruler, one who could sit at the high table of European politics as an equal rather than be regarded with suspicion by his fellow leaders as a potential raider. This brought him great political benefits, perhaps the most significant being his alliance with Conrad II. Denmark and the Holy Roman Empire shared a border – one that had been porous and problematic – but the alliance brought stability, enabling Cnut to concentrate his efforts on his unfinished business in Norway. Conrad’s son married Cnut’s daughter, Gunhilda – it was a sign of the great importance of Cnut in European affairs.

Alongside this, Cnut appeared to retain other more ‘Viking’ characteristics. From what we know, he was a lover of the sagas every bit as much as more traditional Scandinavian rulers had been before him. He himself appears in Viking sagas, though reflecting these extraordinary changing times the heroes here were now typically Christian rather than followers of Odin or Thor. This was a sure sign that the world was changing rapidly, although some parts of Scandinavia would stay stubbornly pagan well beyond the period covered by Cnut’s reign. For example, Uppsala in Sweden was long a centre of worship for the old gods and half a century after Cnut’s death, the Christian writer Adam of Bremen was recording the horrific rites of animal and human sacrifice that were still practised there.

However, Cnut lived a very active life, and it seems to have taken its toll. There are a few hints that he was suffering from some illness that was wearing him down and on 12 November 1035, he breathed his last at Shaftesbury in Dorset. The place of his death is symbolically interesting as the tomb of the murdered English king and saint Edward the Martyr resided there. Throughout his life, Cnut had acted with great respect towards the English royal family that he had replaced. He, as we have seen, emphasised his appreciation of the late, great King

TURNING BACK THE TIDE

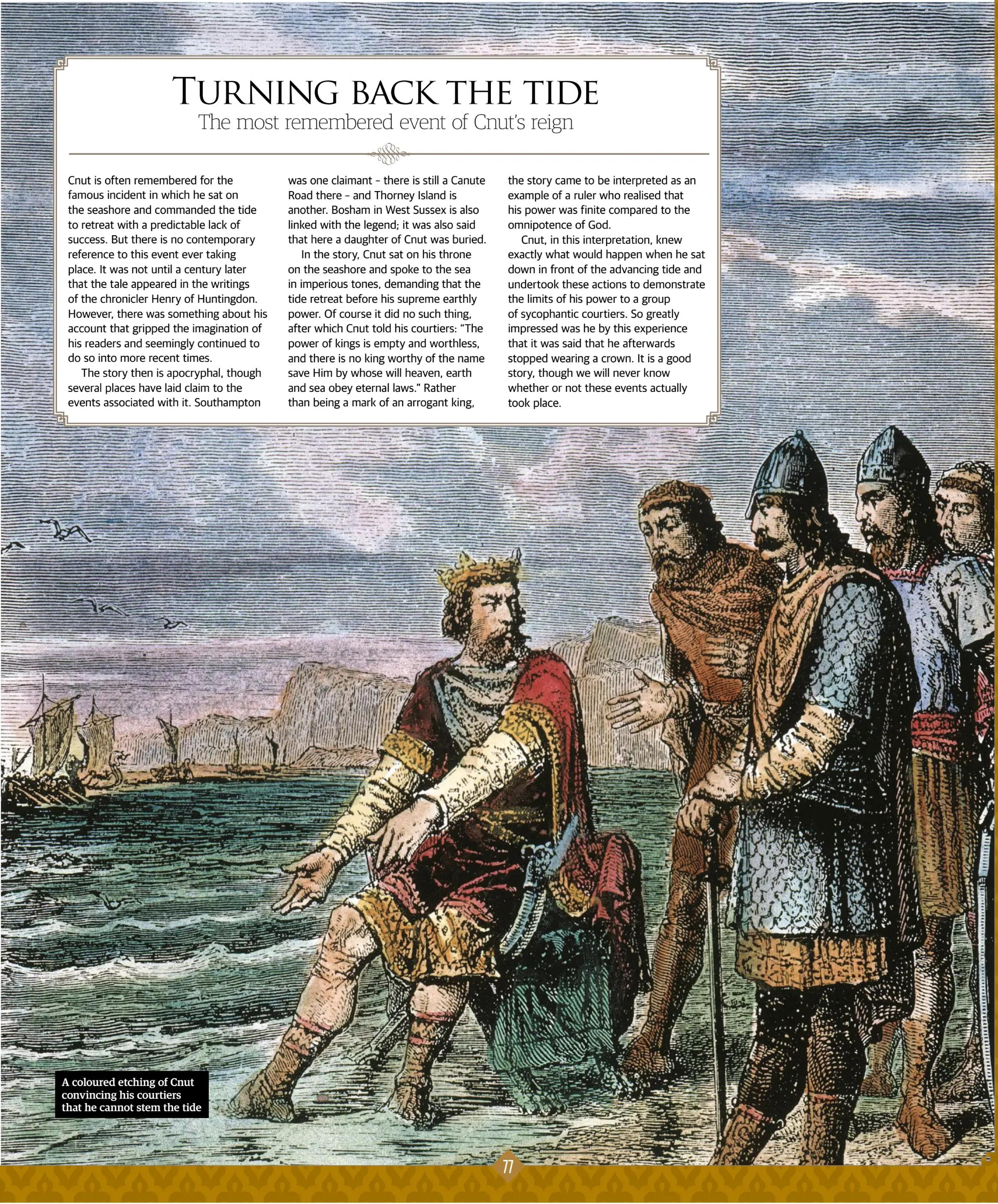
The most remembered event of Cnut's reign

Cnut is often remembered for the famous incident in which he sat on the seashore and commanded the tide to retreat with a predictable lack of success. But there is no contemporary reference to this event ever taking place. It was not until a century later that the tale appeared in the writings of the chronicler Henry of Huntingdon. However, there was something about his account that gripped the imagination of his readers and seemingly continued to do so into more recent times.

The story then is apocryphal, though several places have laid claim to the events associated with it. Southampton was one claimant – there is still a Canute Road there – and Thorney Island is another. Bosham in West Sussex is also linked with the legend; it was also said that here a daughter of Cnut was buried.

In the story, Cnut sat on his throne on the seashore and spoke to the sea in imperious tones, demanding that the tide retreat before his supreme earthly power. Of course it did no such thing, after which Cnut told his courtiers: "The power of kings is empty and worthless, and there is no king worthy of the name save Him by whose will heaven, earth and sea obey eternal laws." Rather than being a mark of an arrogant king, the story came to be interpreted as an example of a ruler who realised that his power was finite compared to the omnipotence of God.

Cnut, in this interpretation, knew exactly what would happen when he sat down in front of the advancing tide and undertook these actions to demonstrate the limits of his power to a group of sycophantic courtiers. So greatly impressed was he by this experience that it was said that he afterwards stopped wearing a crown. It is a good story, though we will never know whether or not these events actually took place.



A coloured etching of Cnut convincing his courtiers that he cannot stem the tide

Edgar by adopting his laws. He even visited the tomb of Edmund Ironside at Glastonbury Abbey in Somerset where he left behind a splendid gift of cloak adorned with peacock feathers – a symbol of both Imperial Byzantine grandeur and also Christian resurrection.

His magnanimity marked him out as a wise man, able to build bridges with the people he had conquered. Although he taxed his people heavily, they, for their part, seem to have accepted his right to rule them; he did at least give them peace and security, a welcome contrast to the four decades that preceded his reign. He was generally regarded by them with respect rather than love. But it was a welcome breathing space after the trauma of the reign of Æthelred 'the Unready'.

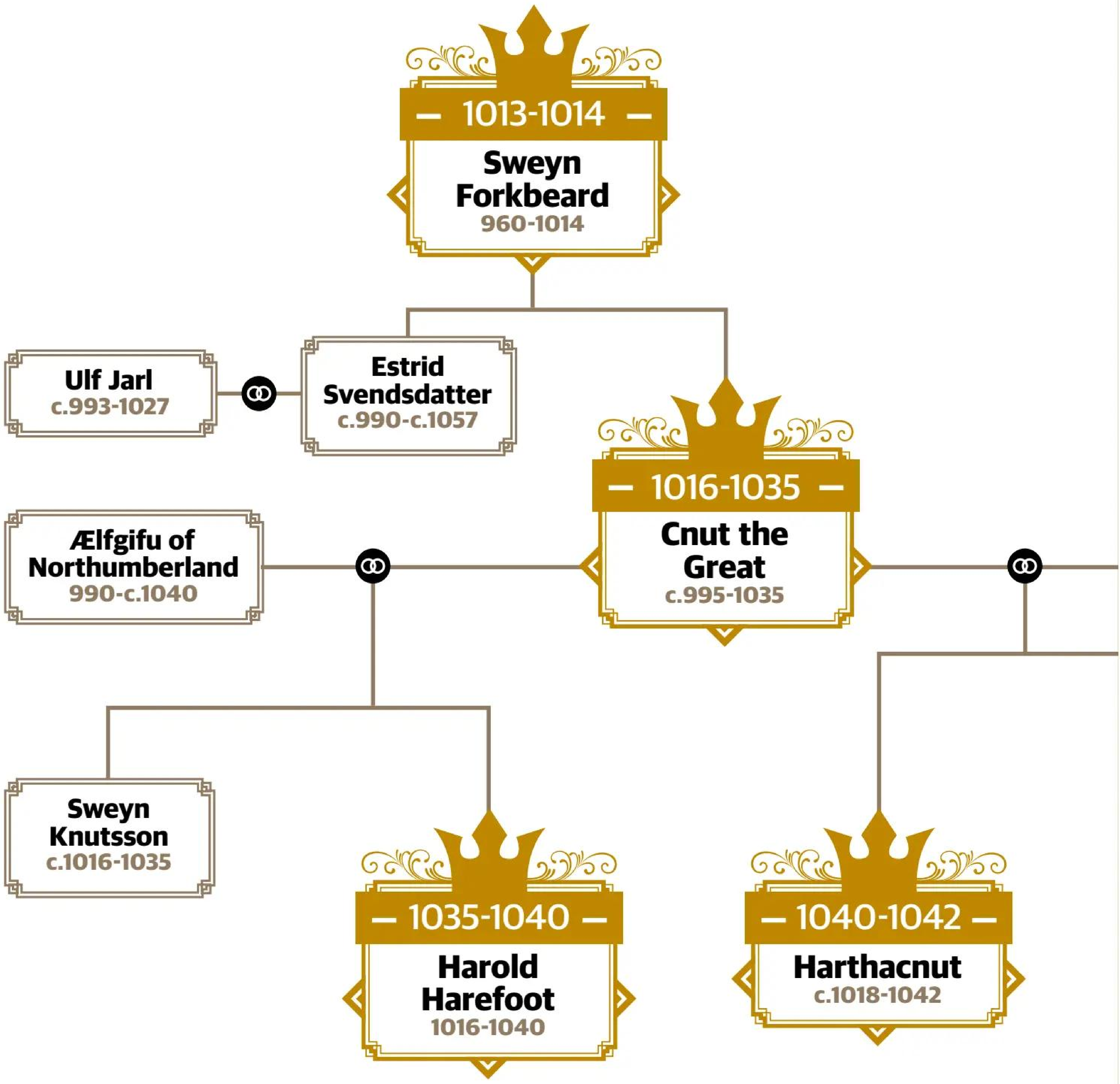
Cnut was buried in the great Anglo-Saxon royal mausoleum in Winchester, where he metaphorically rubbed shoulders with other English kings and saints. In its own way it was another sign of a king who wished to assimilate rather than dictate to his English subjects. Ironically, Cnut's bones were not to find peace in death. In the 16th century, his remains, and those of his wife Emma, were packed together into a mortuary chest and placed high in the presbytery of Winchester Cathedral.

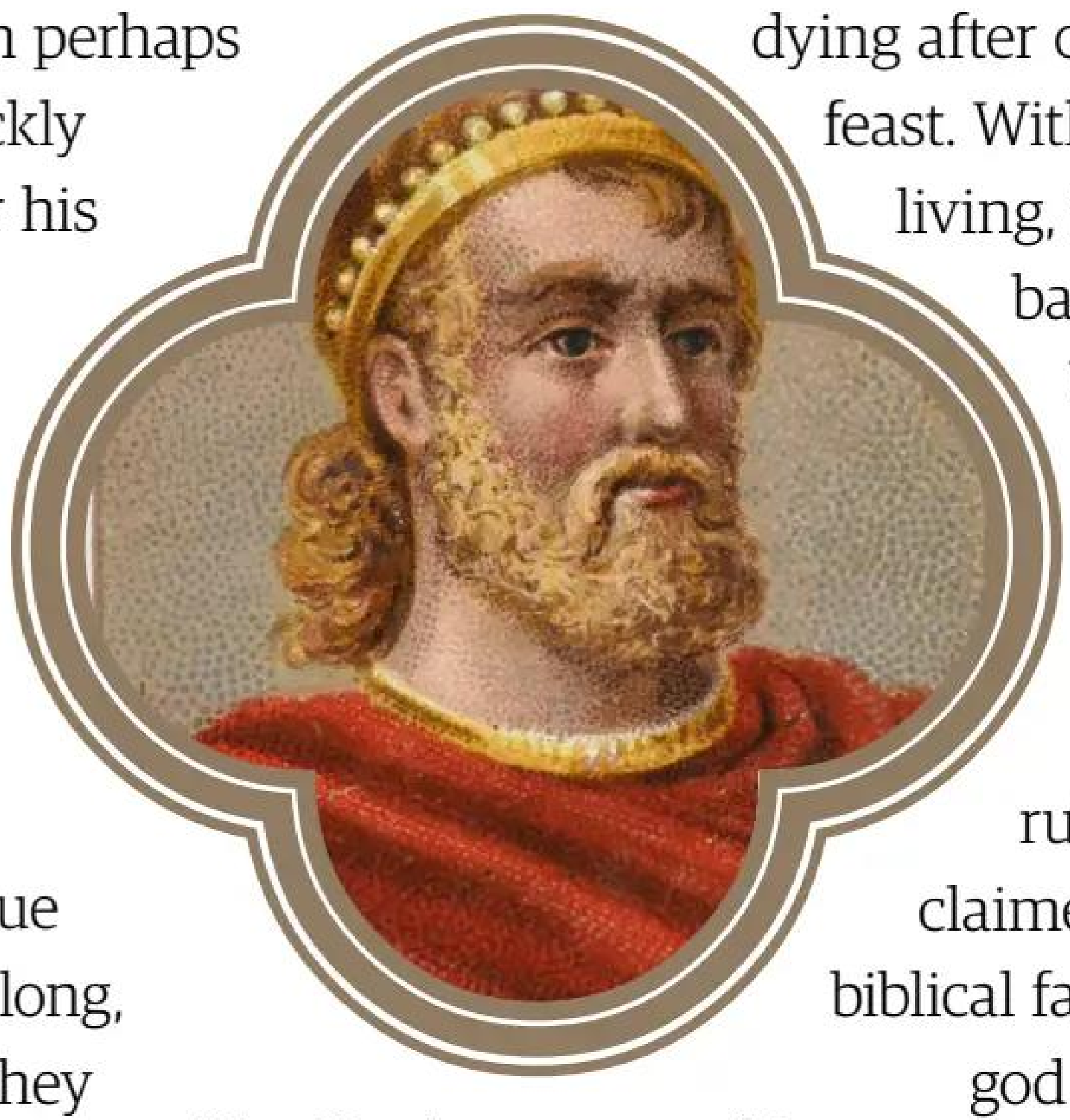
When Winchester Cathedral was entered by Parliamentarian forces in the great Civil War of the 17th century, anti-monarchist soldiers broke open the chests and used the leg-bones to break the splendid stained glass of the West Window. Following the restoration of the English monarchy in 1660, the bones were gathered together and placed in the mortuary chests once more, but by this time they were hopelessly jumbled up; no one knew who went where. At the time of writing, a temporary laboratory has been set up in Winchester Cathedral to try and match the right bones with the right mortuary chests so that Cnut and Emma can once more rest side by side.

The greatness of Cnut's achievements in building an extended kingdom that encompassed both England and Scandinavia can perhaps best be demonstrated by how quickly his empire began to fall apart after his death. Without his great energy, vision and drive, his successors were incapable of keeping it intact. Harold Harefoot, his son from his union with Ælfgifu of Northampton, and Harthacnut, from his marriage with Emma, both became king of England in due course. But neither lasted for very long, nor gave any indication that, had they lived, they would have been very successful monarchs.

ENGLAND'S VIKING OVERLORDS

Discover the lineage of the Vikings who ruled England





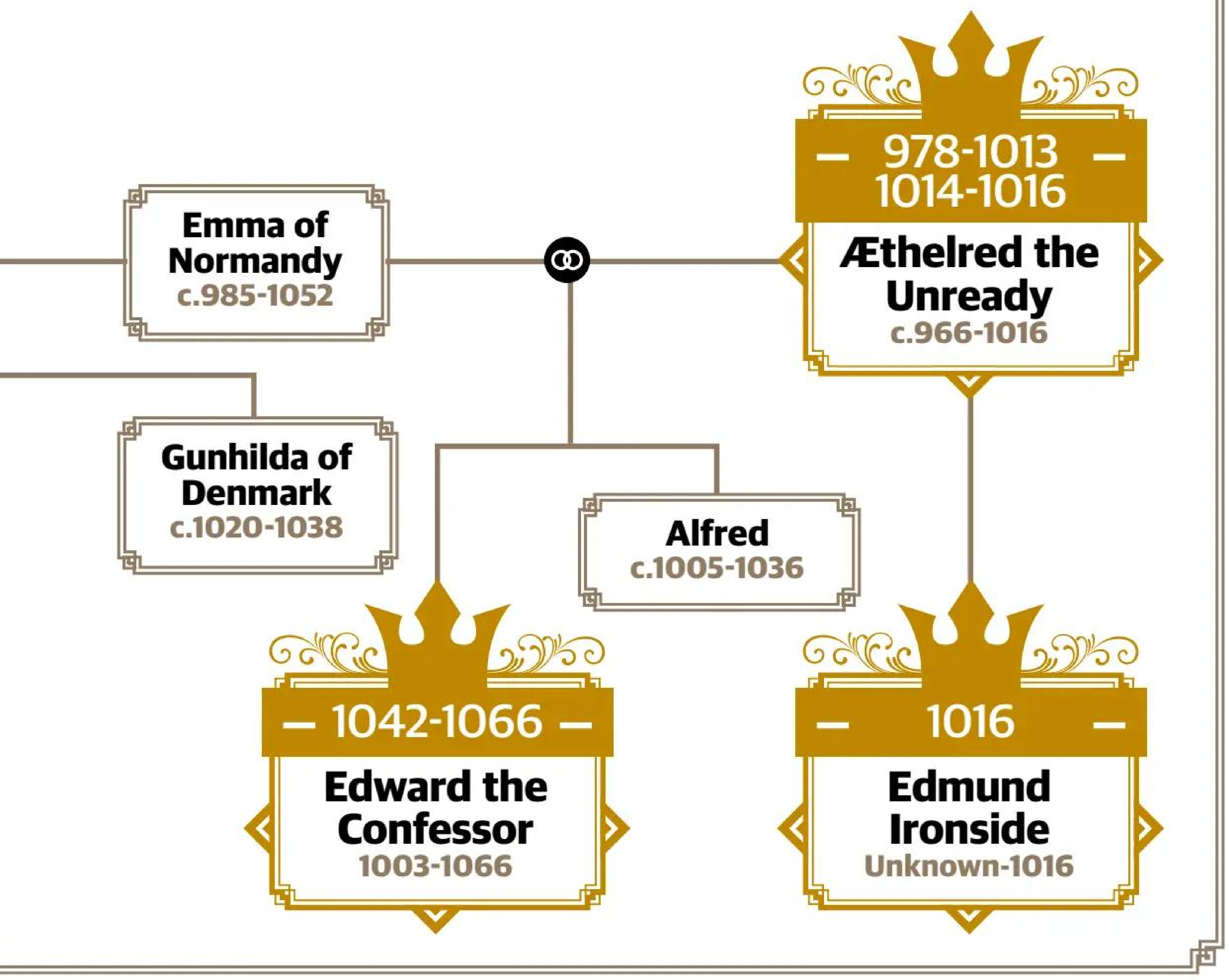
King Harthacnut, son of Cnut and Emma of Normandy, king of England from 1040 to 1042

Harold became sole king of England after Cnut's death but died himself soon after. Harthacnut then became ruler. He too did not survive very long, dying after over-indulging at a wedding feast. With none of Cnut's sons now living, in 1042 the throne reverted back to the Anglo-Saxon bloodline when Edward 'the Confessor' became monarch. He traced his ancestry back to the line of Cerdic of Wessex, a 6th-century ruler and king of Wessex who claimed descent from both Adam of biblical fame and the Germanic/Norse god Woden/Odin. In a somewhat diluted form, after several diversions across the centuries, traces of that bloodline still remain in the British royal family.

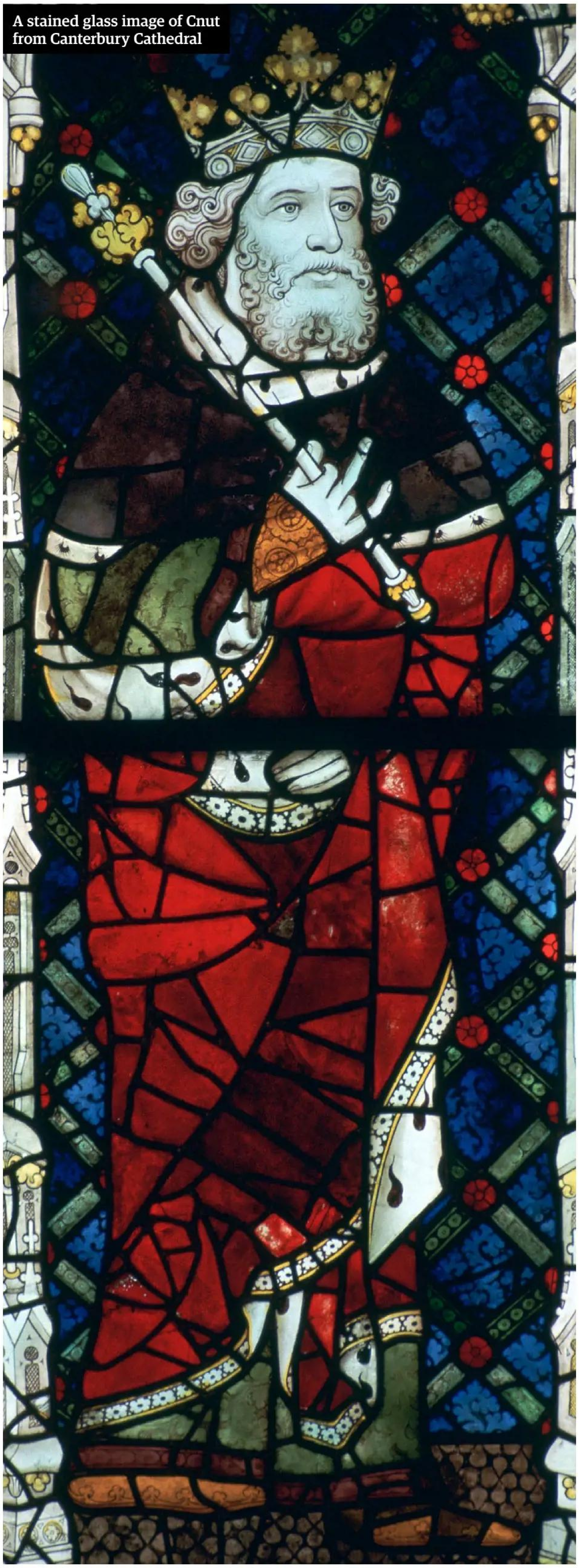
Cnut was the first of only two kings to rule both England and Denmark. He capably governed both, dextrously managing England's great wealth to full advantage and emulating some of the most significant elements of her government to build a strong nation-state in Denmark. He used English churchmen to help build the young Church in Denmark as well as using more practical tools such as the employment of English moneyers to develop Danish coinage.

It would be true to say that the practical results of King Cnut's reign were more deeply felt in the long-run in Denmark rather than England, but his reign was nonetheless a fascinating period in English and European history, and a remarkable achievement in its own right. ◆

> "Cnut was the first of only two kings to rule both England and Denmark"


978-1013
1014-1016
Æthelred the Unready
c.966-1016
Emma of Normandy
c.985-1052
Gunhilda of Denmark
c.1020-1038
Alfred
c.1005-1036
1042-1066
Edward the Confessor
1003-1066
1016
Edmund Ironside
Unknown-1016

The obverse (front) of a silver penny of King Cnut, dated c.1017-23



A stained glass image of Cnut from Canterbury Cathedral

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THE MONGOL EMPIRE

What was it?

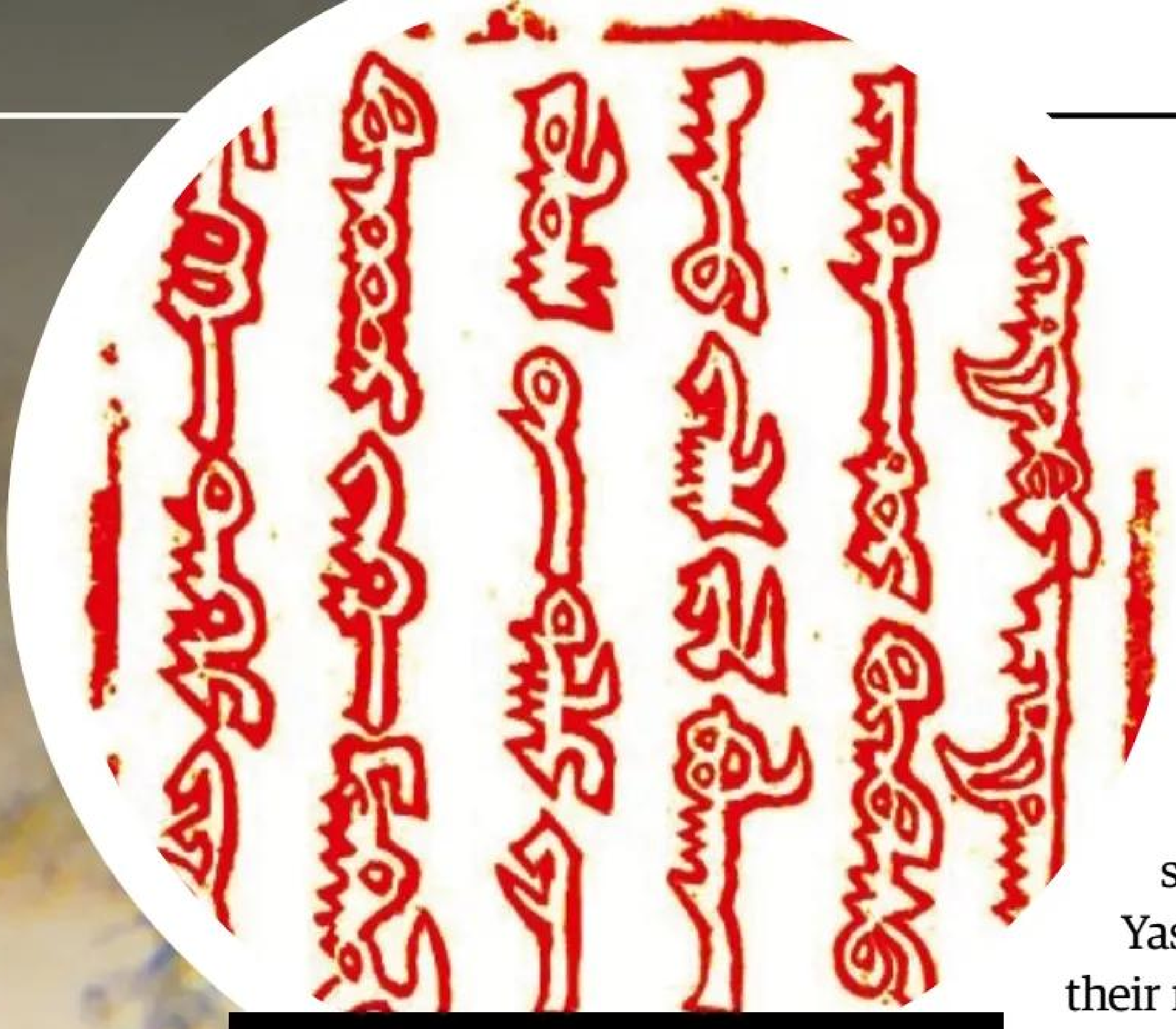
The Mongol Empire at its height is still the world's largest contiguous empire in that its territories were linked by land stretching from southeast Asia to eastern Europe. Founded by Genghis Khan in 1206 and conquered by a highly skilled army that lived and fought on horseback, it splintered under his successors before finally ending in 1368.

How did it start?

12th-century Mongolia was divided up into various nomadic tribes. Temujin succeeded his father as khan – leader – of the Borjigin, and united the Mongols through political alliances and brute force. In 1206, Temujin was declared Genghis ('great') Khan.

Where did they conquer?

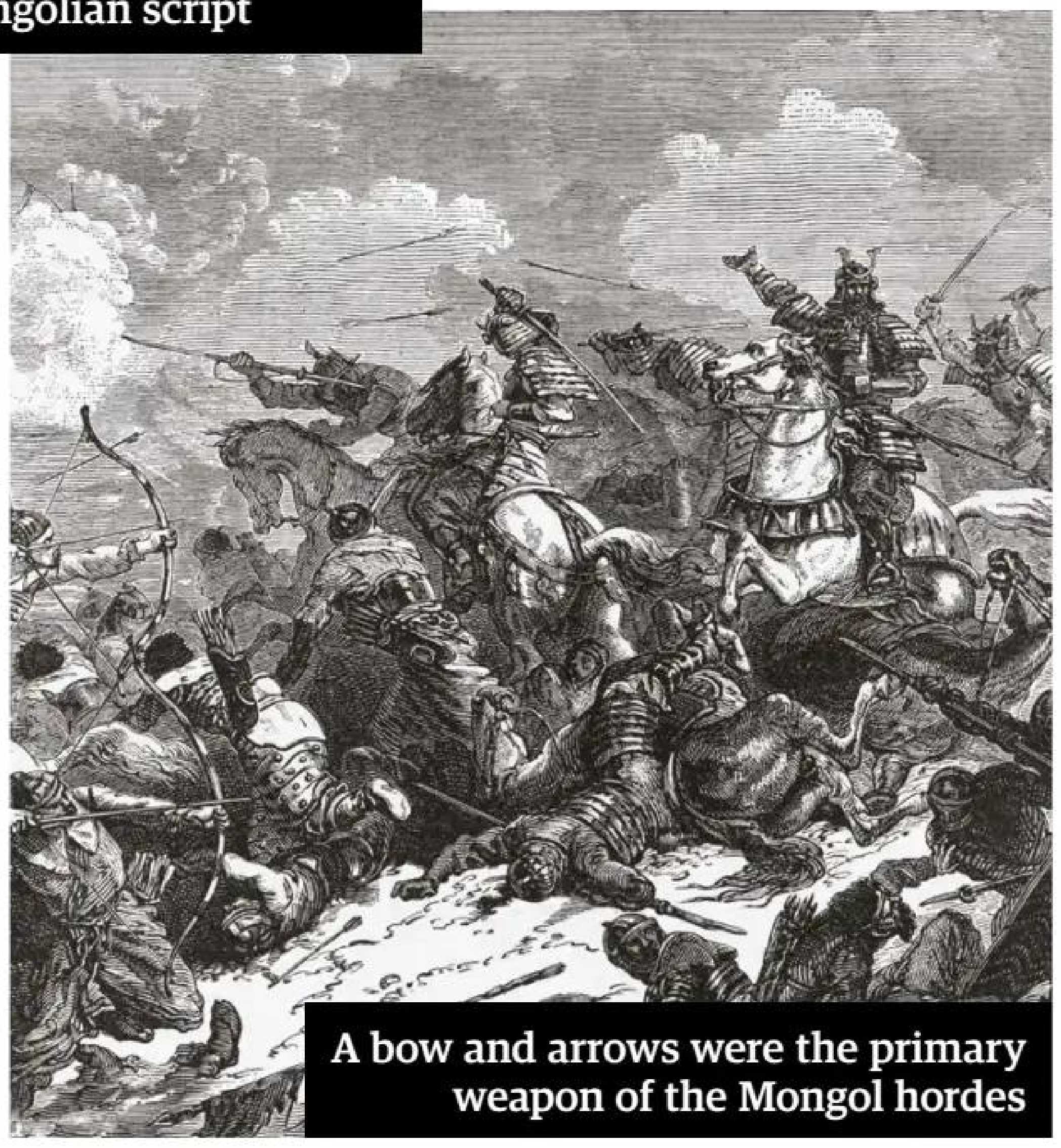
Under Genghis Kahn, the Mongol Empire expanded aggressively into the neighbouring Chinese kingdoms, other central Asian tribal lands, the Persian Khwarezmia dynasty, and even the fringes of Europe in what is now Russia and Bulgaria. Under his successors it would stretch even further.



The seal of Güyük Khan, using the classical Mongolian script

A new revolution

Genghis Khan encouraged religious toleration, exempted the poor from taxes and introduced literacy. His law code, the Yassa, suppressed tribal warfare and imposed strict discipline, with severe penalties for rape and murder. Key to the Yassa was that leaders share the same conditions as their men and take only an equal share of the loot.



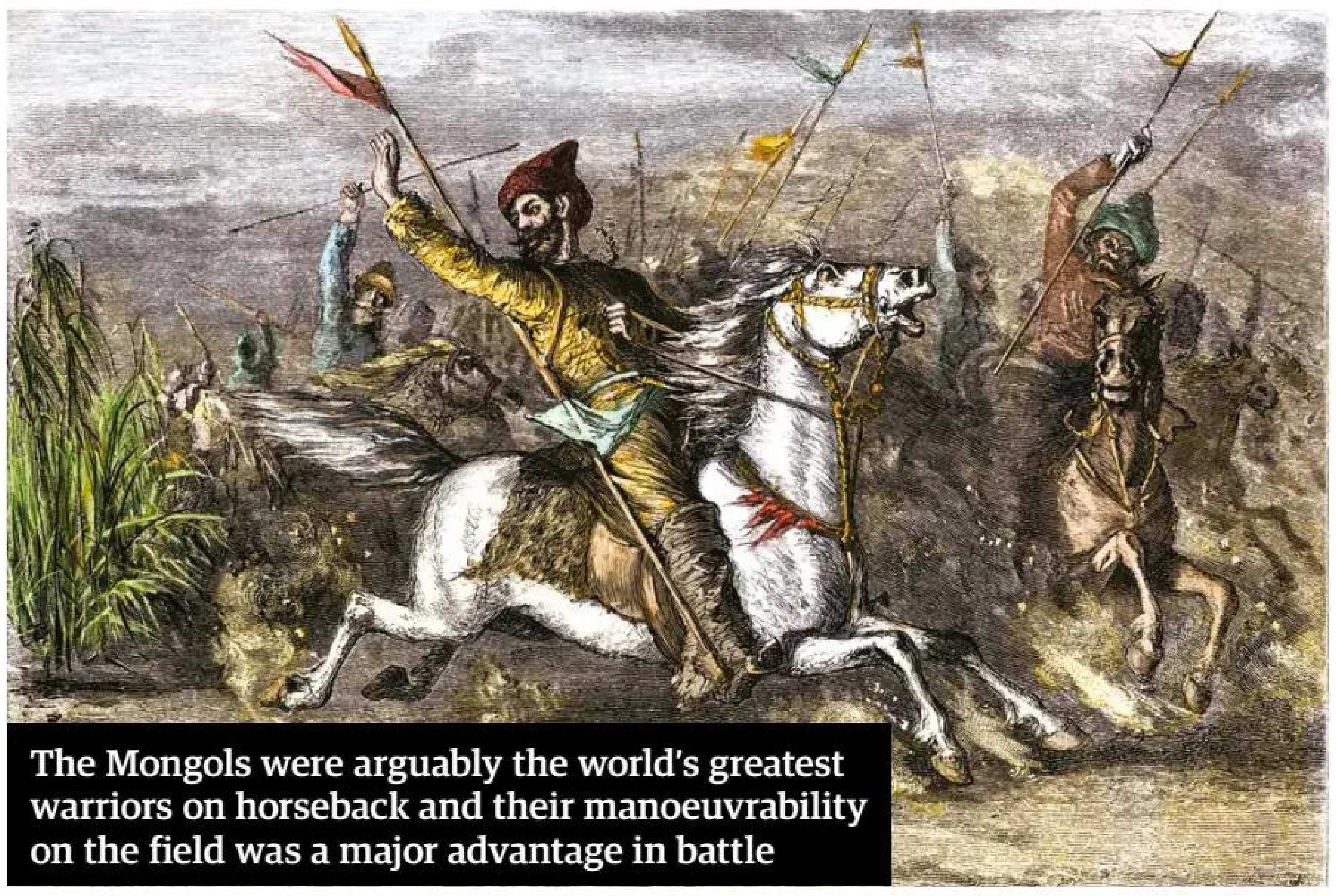
A bow and arrows were the primary weapon of the Mongol hordes

Firing from the hip

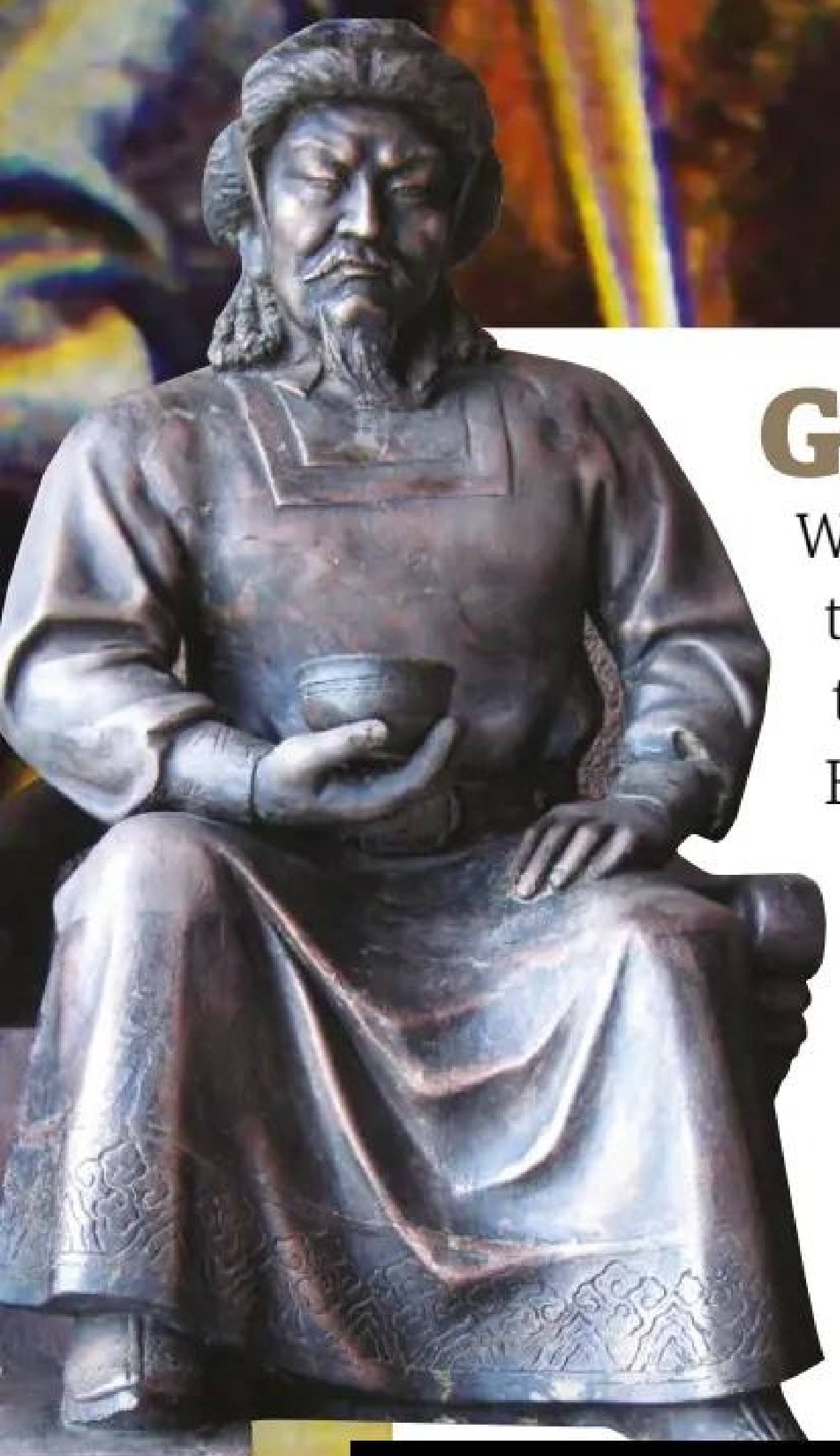
Six out of every ten Mongol warriors were armed with a curved composite bow made from bamboo. A key design innovation and their unique drawing technique made it easier to fire quickly, while the stirrups on their horses – a Chinese invention – allowed them to steer with their feet and fire arrows on the move, granting them advantage on the battlefield.

A surprising meritocracy

Genghis Khan used the Mongols' self-sufficiency as nomads to his advantage, promoting capable soldiers to leadership over tribal nobility. Commanders were free in how they carried out their orders and often adapted their strategies in the field, allowing them to overcome larger and better armed forces.



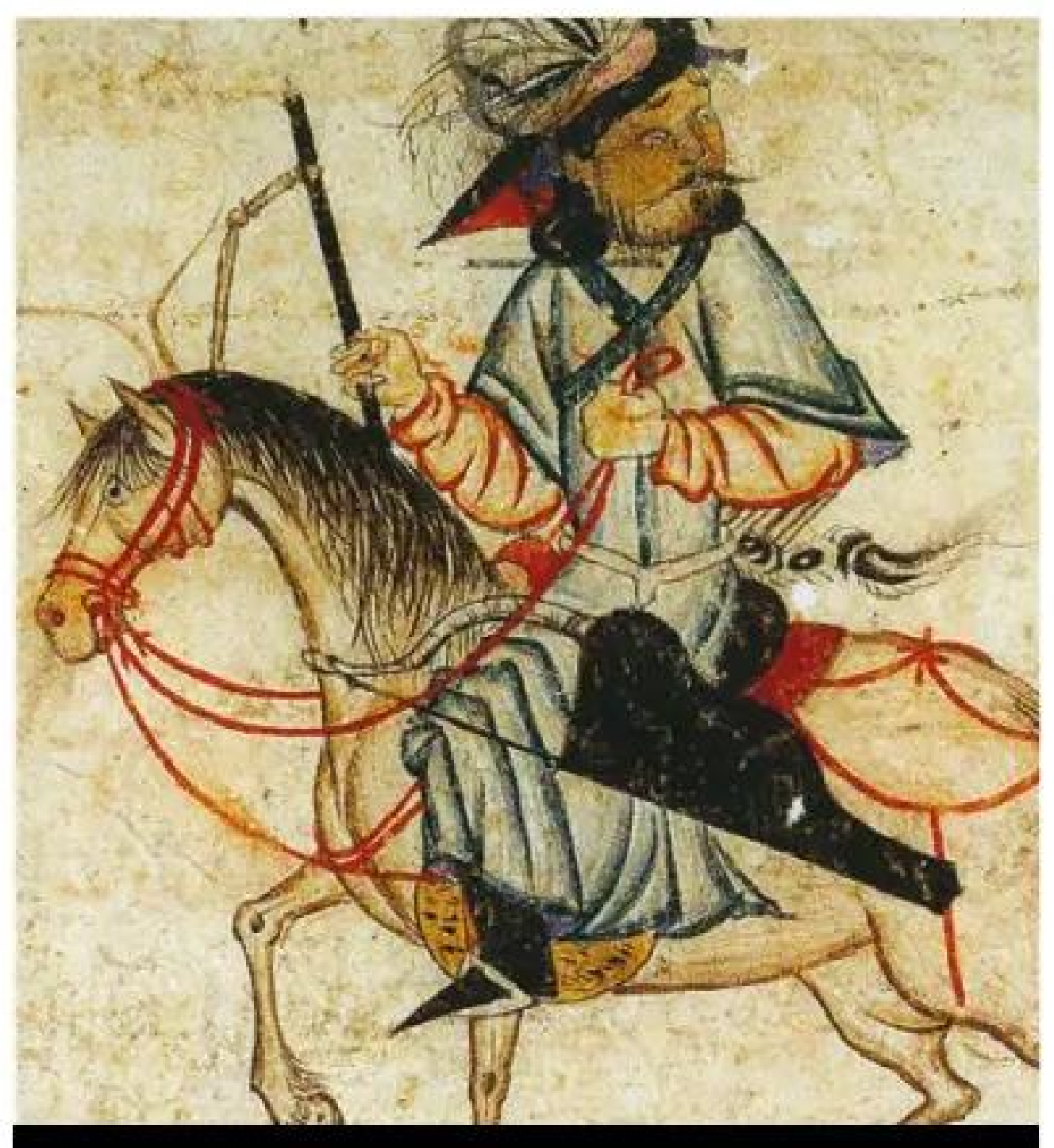
The Mongols were arguably the world's greatest warriors on horseback and their manoeuvrability on the field was a major advantage in battle



A statue of Ögedei Khan

Great leaders

When Genghis Khan died in 1227 the Mongol Empire was double the size of the Roman Empire. He had declared his third son ruler and after his election was confirmed by the tribal council in 1229, Ögedei Khan resumed his father's mission of conquest, invading central China, Korea, northern India, Poland, Hungary and many more.



Messengers could travel up to 125 miles a day

Message system

While not the world's first relay system, the Ortoo was completely unprecedented in scale and efficiency, sending messages up to 125 miles a day. Riders would gallop between regularly spaced relay stations, changing horses and collecting supplies at each one. The upkeep of the Ortoo was enshrined in the Yassa and was paramount to the security of the Mongol Empire.

Key figures

Genghis Khan

1162-1227

The founder of the Mongol Empire, relentless warlord and architect of a new society.

Ögedei Khan

1186-1241

Genghis' son took the Mongol Empire to its greatest East-West extent and created a new regional bureaucracy.

Güyük Khan

1206-1248

Son of Ögedei and grandson of Genghis, Güyük taxed, drank and conquered equally as heavily as his grandfather.

Möngke Khan

1209-1259

Descended from Genghis' fourth son, Möngke reformed the economy and reeled in the Mongol nobles.

Kublai Khan

1215-1294

Younger brother of Möngke, Kublai became Emperor of China in 1271, founding the powerful Yuan Dynasty.

Major events

Genghis Khan rises

1206

Temujin unites the tribes, beginning over a century of violent conquest and radical social change.

Mongols turn west

1218

Mongol envoys are killed in Persia and Genghis Khan turns his attention west for the first time. His envoys would be avenged many times over.

Ögedei Khan dies

1241

The Khan's death halts the invasion of Hungary as years of in-fighting take over.

Japan resists

1274

The invading Mongol war machine is pushed back into the sea by Japanese samurai and a helpful typhoon.

The Empire falls

1368

China's Ming Dynasty overthrows the Mongol Yuan Dynasty and brings the Mongol Empire to an end.

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terre
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GINYA
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tenbuch
ciutat de melly

ASHARA
macara
buda

THE MALI EMPIRE

1230-1670

Stretching across West Africa, the Mansa who ruled the Mali Empire became rich due to its position on trans-Sahara trade routes. Mansa Musa – pictured here on a Catalan map – showed off his spectacular wealth on an extravagant pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324, during which he was escorted by 60,000 Malians and camels loaded with gold.

حصار سگتوار

THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

From humble beginnings, the Ottomans went on to conquer lands in three continents, forging an empire that lasted for 700 years

Written by Will Lawrence

It was an empire founded on the promise of a dream that visited the Turkish tribal chief Osman as he slept one night outside the home of a holy man. During his slumber, Osman saw a moon rise from the holy man's breast and sink into his own. Then a tree sprouted from his own navel, spreading its branches and encompassing the entire world. The holy man interpreted this night-vision as God giving Osman imperial office. The dream became reality.

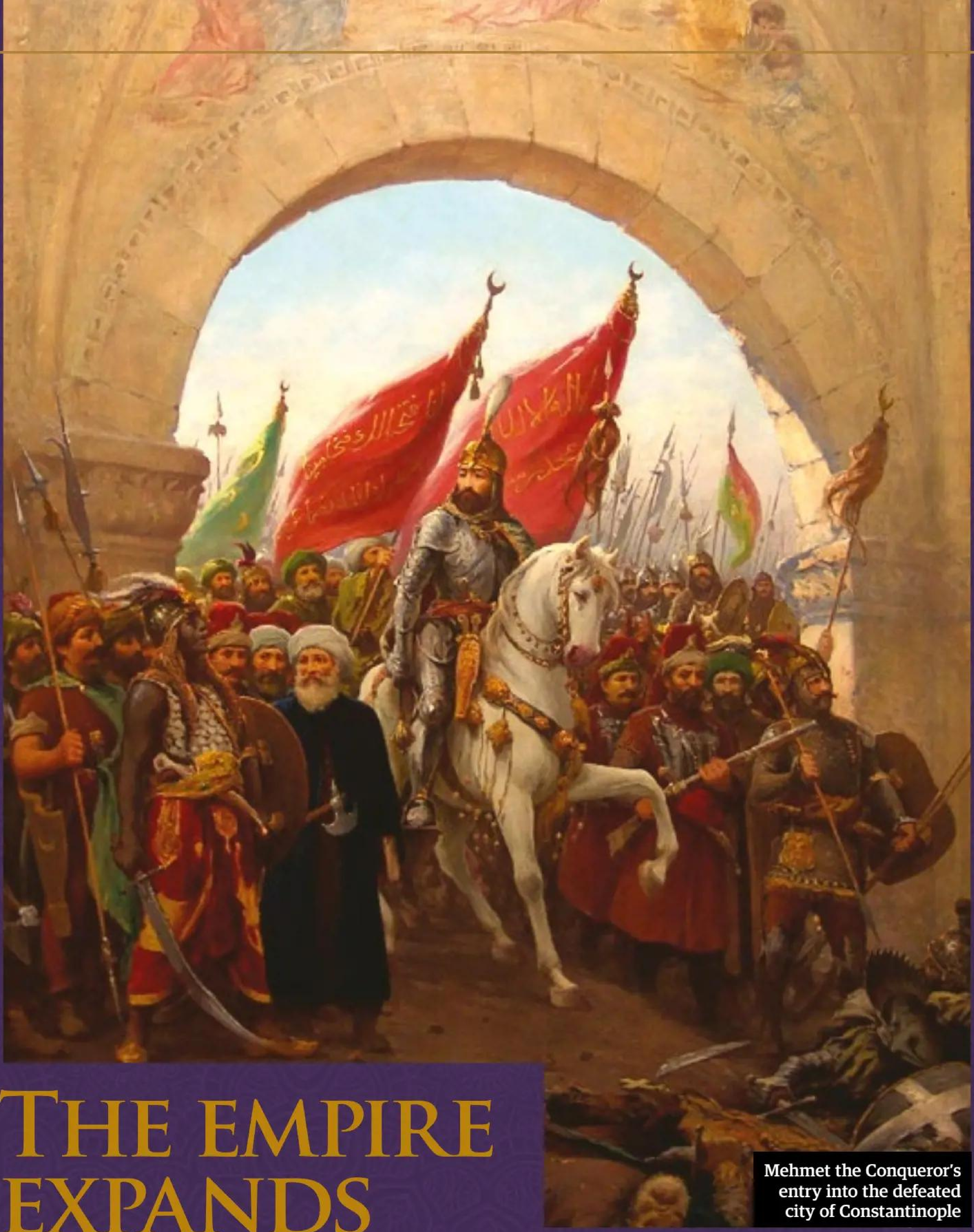
In truth, this vision was first communicated in the 15th century, 100 years after Osman's death. However, it stands as one of the empire's key founding myths and provided temporal and divine authority for the its remarkable success, for the Ottoman Empire was indeed an almighty achievement. Launched from the plains of the smallest Turkish emirate in western Anatolia, at the height of its power it stretched from Hungary to the Persian Gulf and from North Africa to the Caucasus, before beginning a slow decline through the 17th century to its final demise in the 1920s.

The Ottomans first made their mark at the turn of the 14th century, when they were just one among many Turkish tribal groups from central Asia vying for prominence in Anatolia, the swathe of land nestled between the Black Sea, the Aegean and the Mediterranean. This land had once formed part of the Eastern Roman Empire and then, after the founding of Constantinople, its continuation into the Byzantine Empire. Following the conquest of this great city by the Europeans of the Fourth Crusade during the previous century, however, the Byzantine Empire had diminished, and by 1300 its Asian holdings comprised only a few ports on the Anatolian coast.

The Ottomans' first step towards toppling the Byzantines and establishing a regional authority came under the leadership of Osman, and at the expense of their fellow Turkish tribes in Anatolia. The region flexed its autonomous muscles during the 1291 succession dispute among their Mongol overlords in Persia. But, as the other Turkish tribes gradually gave up the fight, Osman continued fighting and by 1299, his Ottomans were besieging the city of Nicaea. The Ottomans' great period of conquest was about to begin.

In 1302, the Byzantine emperor Andronicus II, alarmed at Osman's growing influence and his perennial raiding of the Byzantine borderlands, mustered his army to put the Turkish tribesmen in their place. The Byzantine force met the Ottomans not far from Constantinople, on the southern shore of the Sea of Marmara, where they were ambushed and routed from the field.

This was the Ottomans' first great victory over the Byzantines and greatly enhanced Osman's reputation, as did his follow-up campaign, which severed communications between the cities of Brusa and Nicaea. Thousands of immigrant Turkish households rallied to his banner. As Osman's power grew, Andronicus sought alliances, though these came to nought, and Ottoman raiding continued until Osman's death around 1323-24. Leadership passed to Osman's son, Orhan, who went on to capture Brusa, establishing the first Ottoman capital. This was in 1326, a date that is often cited as the birth of the empire itself.



Mehmet the Conqueror's entry into the defeated city of Constantinople

THE EMPIRE EXPANDS

Between the 14th and 16th centuries, the Ottoman Empire flowered, threatening the very heart of Europe

In the 1340s, civil war erupted within the Byzantine Empire and the Ottomans were invited to step into imperial affairs, leading to the capture of Gallipoli in 1354, their first foothold in Europe. They extended their influence into the continent when, in 1361, Murad I captured the city of Adrianople, which was renamed Edirne before emerging as the new Ottoman capital in 1365.

The Ottomans' freshly acquired territories now encircled Constantinople and the emperor, John V, signed a treaty that saw his once mighty city become little more than an Ottoman vassal.

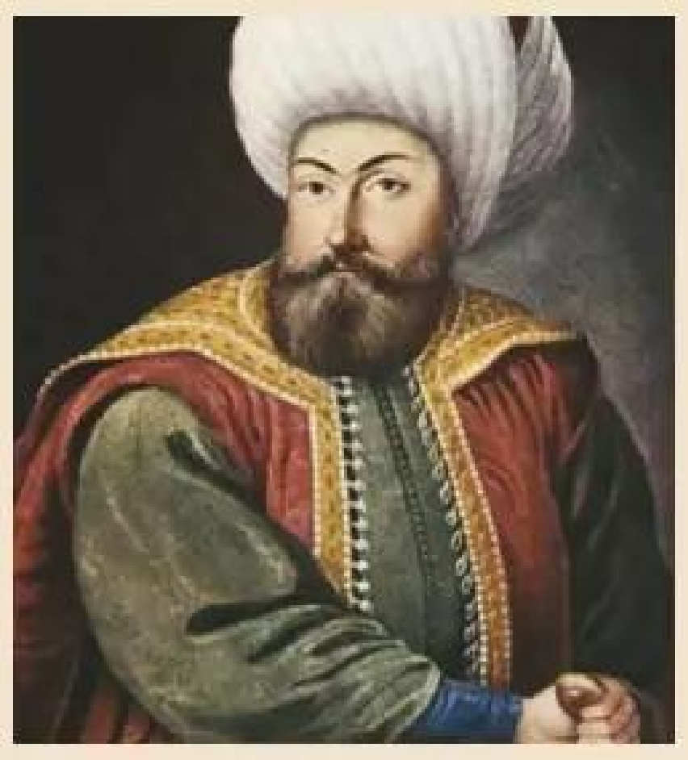
With a European base at Edirne, the Ottomans struck out against the Balkans. The Serbian Empire was also burgeoning during this period, but the decisive Battle of Kosovo in 1389, though claiming the life of Murad I, saw the Ottomans emerge victorious once again. Murad's son Bayezid succeeded his father and earned the name 'the Thunderbolt', such was his military prowess.

Claiming he would water his horse at the altar of St Peter's in Rome, he quelled rebellion within the empire before taking Bosnia and Bulgaria, and then finally coming face to face with western Europe, winning his first engagement against European heavy cavalry at the Battle of Nicopolis in 1396. The Ottomans did not escape without setbacks, and the rise of the fabled leader Tamerlane, the successor to the Mongols in the east, checked their power when defeating and capturing Bayezid at Anakara in 1402. It seemed as though the empire would disintegrate amid the power struggle that followed Bayezid's death.

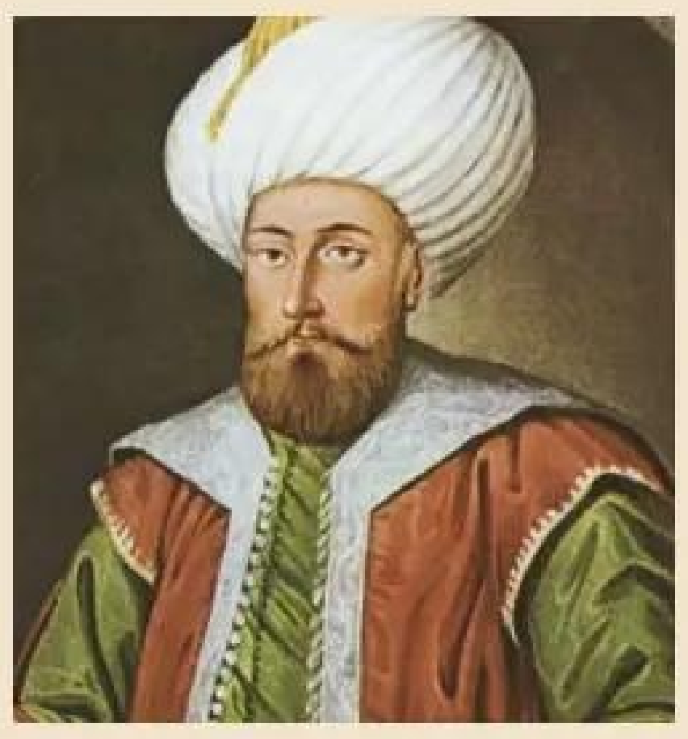
Ottoman fortunes began to revive, however, picking up pace when Sultan Murad II led the first, albeit unsuccessful, siege of Constantinople in 1422. He launched a Hungarian offensive in 1439 that culminated in one of the greatest Ottoman victories at Varna in 1444, where the Hungarians and Western crusading forces, which included the mighty Teutonic Knights, were heavily defeated.

It was Murad's successor, Mehmet II, who was to cement Ottoman power in the European sphere. Known to history as Mehmet the Conqueror, he finally toppled Constantinople in 1453 and ravaged

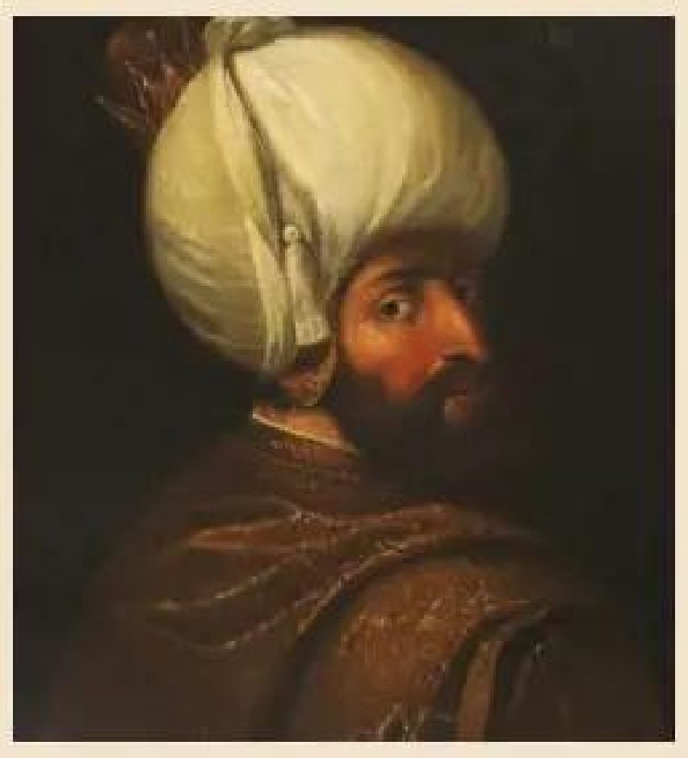
THE EARLY OTTOMAN LEADERS



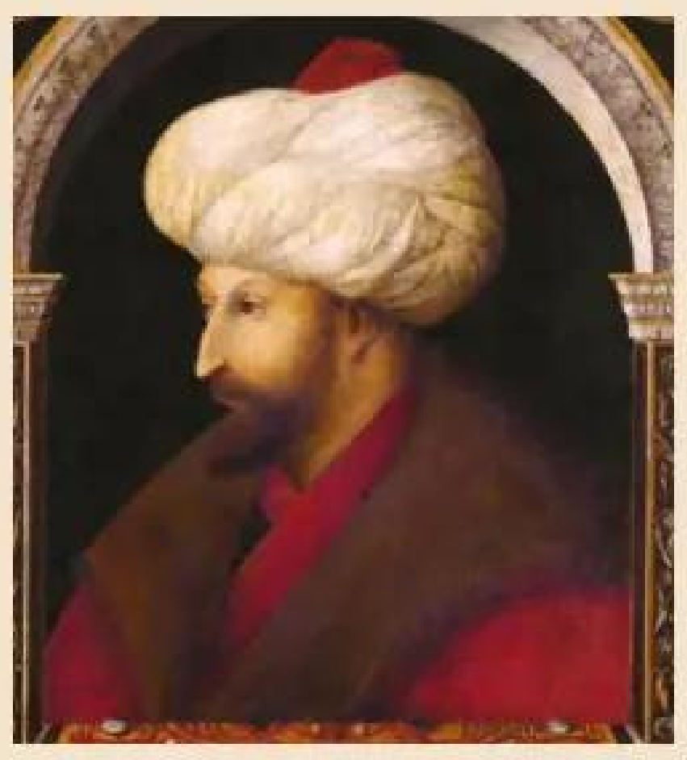
Osman I: The founder
Little is known about the background of this ruler of a small principality in northwestern Anatolia. Both the name of the dynasty and the empire that the dynasty established are derived from his name's Arabic form, Uthmān. He died in 1323/24.



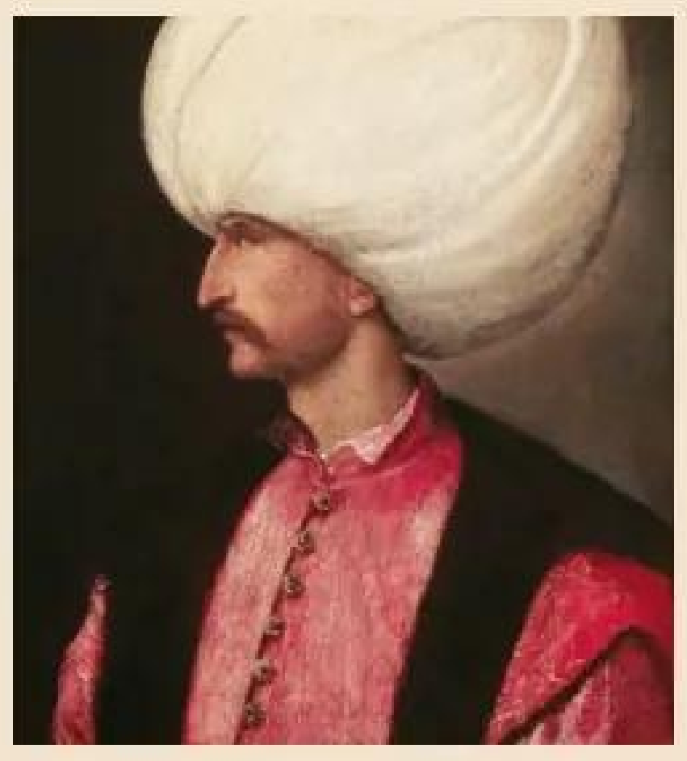
Murad I: The first sultan
Ruling from 1360 to 1389, Murad oversaw rapid Ottoman expansion in Anatolia and the Balkans. During his reign, new forms of government and administration emerged to consolidate Ottoman rule. The Janissaries and the child-levy flowered under his stewardship.



Bayezid I: 'The Thunderbolt'
The most ambitious of the Ottoman leaders, Bayezid ruled from 1389 to 1402 and founded the first centralised Ottoman state based on traditional Muslim institutions. He also stressed the need to extend Ottoman conquest in Anatolia as well as waging war against the infidels.

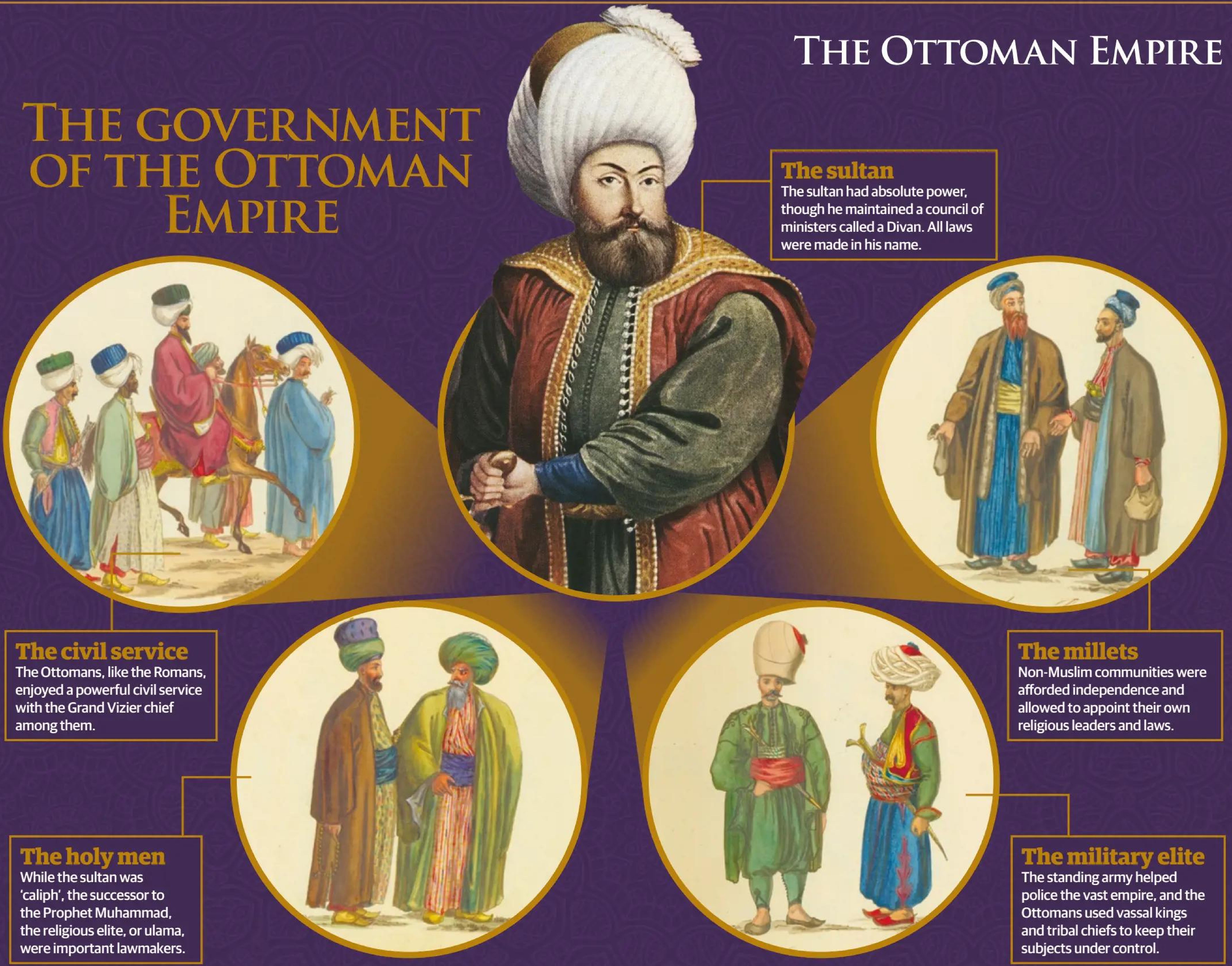


Mehmet II: 'The Conqueror'
Mehmet ruled from 1444 to 1446, and then again from 1451 to 1481. Despite his youth, he overruled his advisers and conquered Constantinople, bringing down the Byzantine Empire and establishing what would remain the Ottoman heartland for the next 400 years.



Suleiman I: 'The Magnificent'
Sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1520 to 1566, Suleiman's bold military campaigns expanded the realm - he evicted the Hospitallers from Rhodes and won the great victory at Mohács - while making great strides in the fields of law, literature, architecture and art.

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE



The sultan
The sultan had absolute power, though he maintained a council of ministers called a Divan. All laws were made in his name.

The civil service
The Ottomans, like the Romans, enjoyed a powerful civil service with the Grand Vizier chief among them.

The millets
Non-Muslim communities were afforded independence and allowed to appoint their own religious leaders and laws.

The holy men
While the sultan was 'caliph', the successor to the Prophet Muhammad, the religious elite, or ulama, were important lawmakers.

The military elite
The standing army helped police the vast empire, and the Ottomans used vassal kings and tribal chiefs to keep their subjects under control.

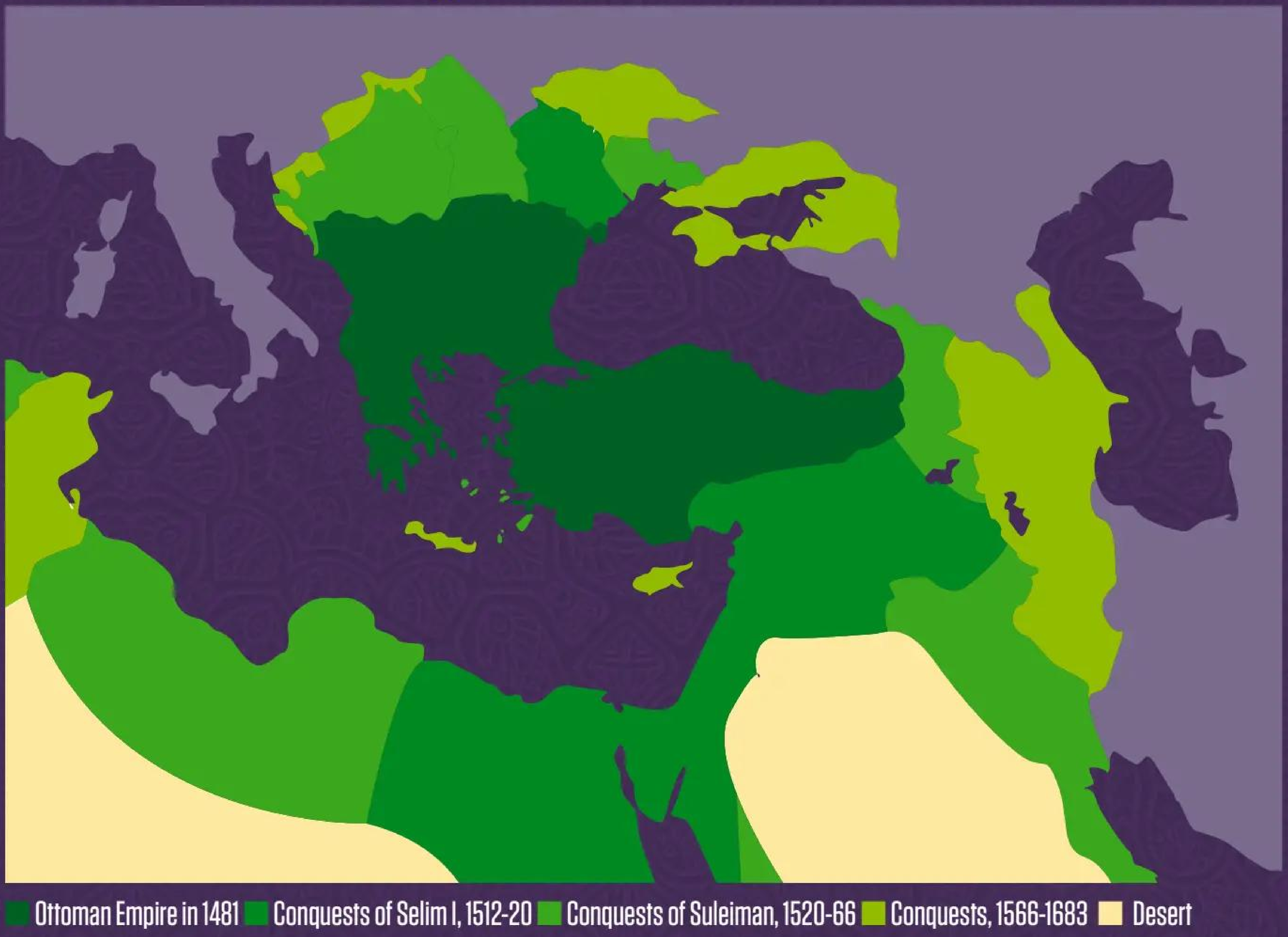
the Balkan states. In Greece, the Duchy of Athens surrendered in 1456 and the Ottomans soon conquered the Peloponnese.

The infamous Vlad Tepes (the Impaler) caused problems for the Ottomans in Wallachia and the Knights Hospitaller successfully defended Rhodes, though Mehmet remained unperturbed. He launched his most audacious campaign in 1480 with the invasion of Italy, causing panic in Western Europe. Italy was saved not by Europe's military might but by Mehmet's death in 1481.

In 1520, the man widely perceived as the Ottomans' greatest sultan, Suleiman 'the Magnificent', came to power, capturing Belgrade a year after his accession, taking the Hospitaller island of Rhodes the year after that and then winning his greatest victory in 1526 - when he brought about the collapse of Medieval Hungary.

From now on, the Ottomans would hammer away at the great empire of the Habsburg dynasty as the rest of Europe trembled. They expanded into North Africa and fought many more famous battles – the Great Siege of Malta (1565), the capture of Cyprus, the great naval conflict at Lepanto (1571) and the slaughter at Kerestes (1596). The enemy was at the gates and war for the European heartland was not far behind.

Ottoman conquests 1481-1683


🟩 Ottoman Empire in 1481
🟩 Conquests of Selim I, 1512-20
🟩 Conquests of Suleiman, 1520-66
🟩 Conquests, 1566-1683
🟨 Desert

THE JANISSARIES

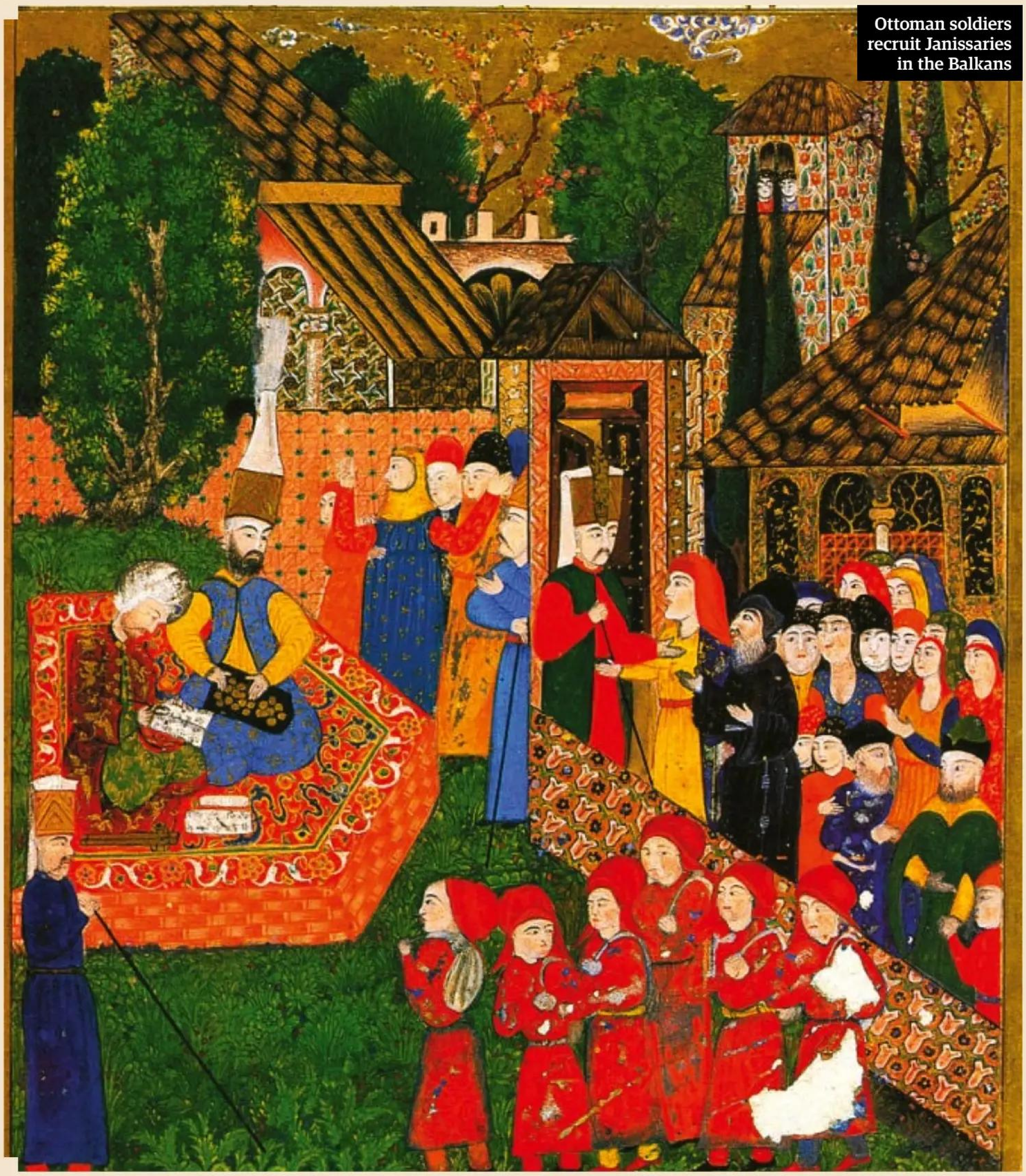
The Ottoman army was a fearsome machine, unlike anything else that Medieval Europe had ever seen, and their elite troops were the mighty Janissaries

In Medieval Europe, the Ottoman army was unique – the entire empire lived for war and one conquest fuelled the next. Even later in the empire's life, during the Siege of Baghdad in 1683 when the Persians demanded the contest be settled by single combat, the sultan, Mehmet IV, stepped forward and cut down the Persian champion himself.

Unlike the European armies they so regularly routed, the Ottoman forces were full-time professionals. Chief among their myriad units were the Janissaries, the Ottoman elite infantry, who lived solely for war. Even marriage and family were forbidden to them.

Their only love was combat; the only person to whom they owed loyalty was the sultan. They were his men, forming his personal bodyguard. They were recruited from Christian slave boys – to enslave fellow Muslims was contrary to religious law – though to describe the Janissaries as a slave-army fails to recognise the honour and prestige they enjoyed within the Ottoman Empire.

The boys surrendered little when they left their homes. Recruited mostly from the Balkan states, they left behind poverty in a rural life that offered little hope of professional advancement. Once converted to Islam, educated and trained, they became important players in an empire that admired martial ability and, as time developed, like the Praetorian Guard in ancient Rome they even became kingmakers, famously rebelling against Osman II in 1622 and restoring Mustapha to the Sultanate.



Ottoman soldiers recruit Janissaries in the Balkans

RECRUITMENT

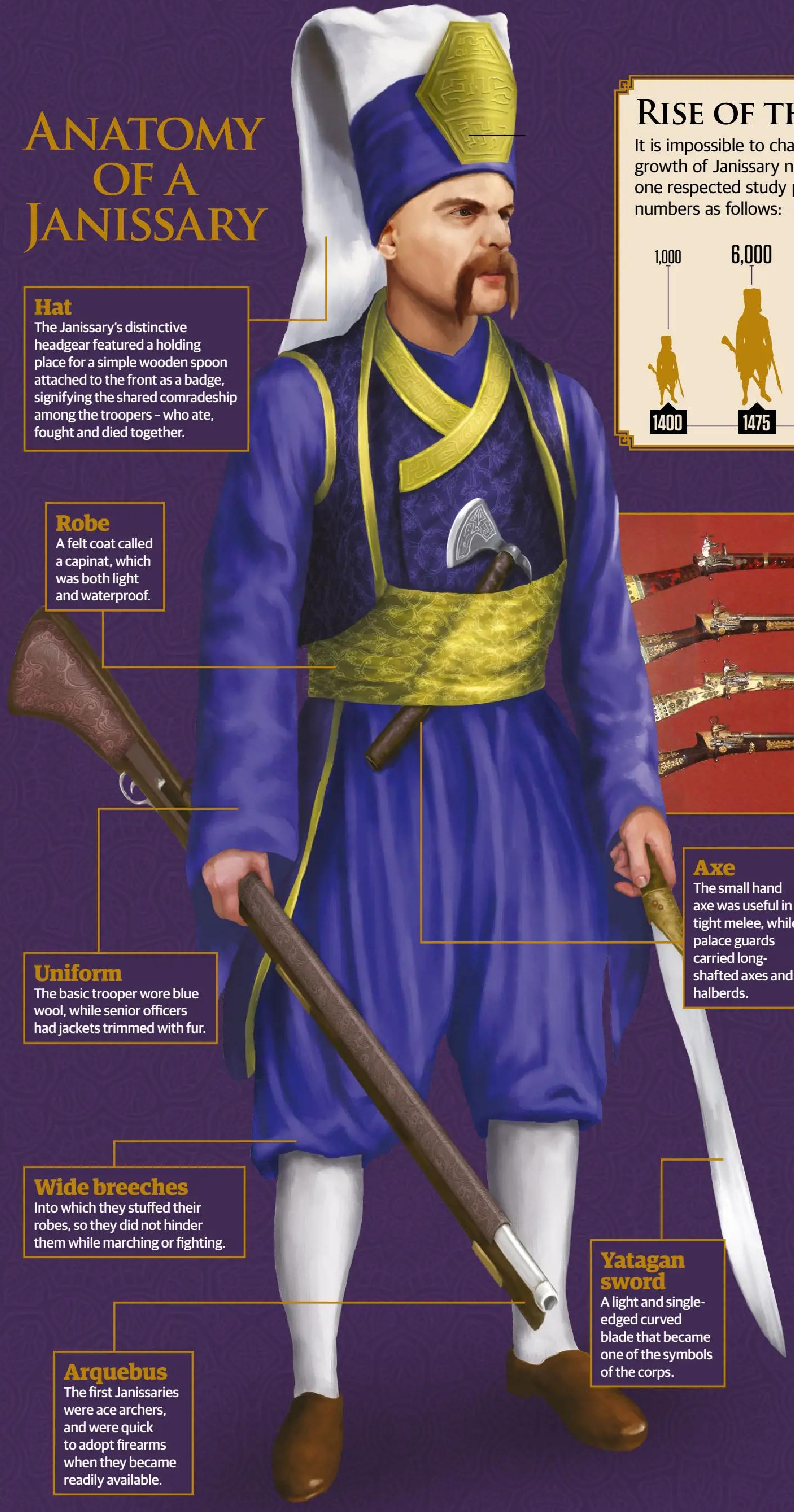
Murad I is widely regarded as the founder of the Janissary units following his recruitment of Christian prisoners of war into his army some time after 1377. It was a move that was enhanced by his successor, Bayezid, who introduced the 'gathering' during the 1380s, a levy on Christian boys, aged between eight and 18 years, from the Balkan states. "We light our lamp with oil taken from the hearts of the infidels," wrote Sultan Mehmet II in the 1400s.

Ottoman officials would visit the Balkan villages every three to seven years and drafted the best-looking, strongest and most intelligent boys to be employed in service of the empire, either as soldiers (in the case of the Janissaries), administrators or palace servants.

In the earlier years of empire, the Ottomans were careful not to impoverish their subjects and so would absolve from the levy any boy who was the oldest or the only male child in his family, or any who was a widow's son, and they would never deplete a village of its entire stock. It was in the Ottoman interests to keep Balkan agriculture as buoyant as possible to fuel their empire and keep rebellions quiet. During the 1500s, it is estimated that the yearly draft was about 1,000 to 3,000 boys.

Often families from poor mountain districts would volunteer their sons willingly, delighted to see them step onto the Ottoman career ladder. Though technically slaves, the Janissaries could maintain contact with their families and, as possessions of the sultan himself, could not be bought or sold.

ANATOMY OF A JANISSARY



Hat
The Janissary's distinctive headgear featured a holding place for a simple wooden spoon attached to the front as a badge, signifying the shared comradeship among the troopers – who ate, fought and died together.

Robe
A felt coat called a capinat, which was both light and waterproof.

Uniform
The basic trooper wore blue wool, while senior officers had jackets trimmed with fur.

Wide breeches
Into which they stuffed their robes, so they did not hinder them while marching or fighting.

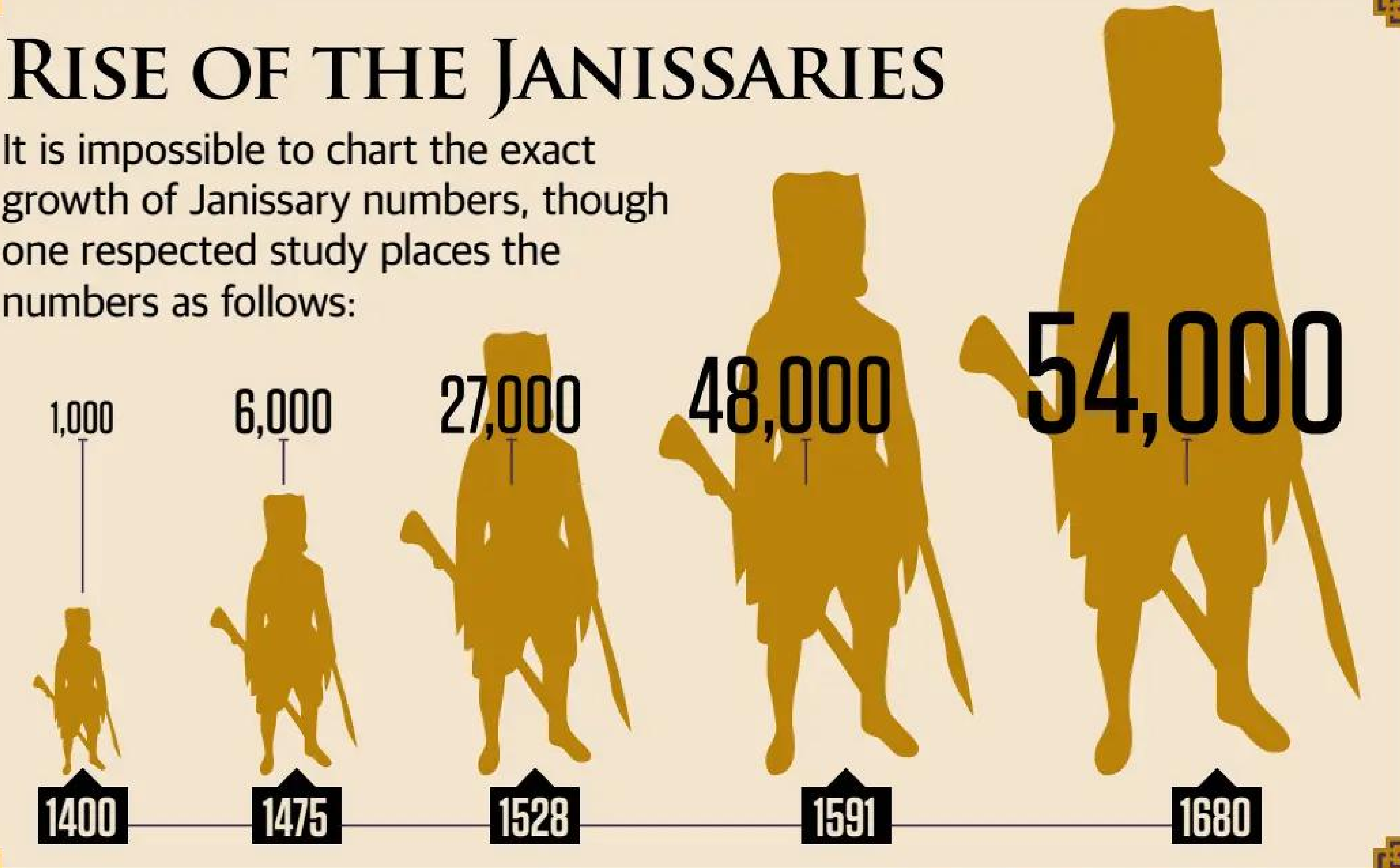
Arquebus
The first Janissaries were ace archers, and were quick to adopt firearms when they became readily available.

Axe
The small hand axe was useful in a tight melee, while palace guards carried long-shafted axes and halberds.

Yatagan sword
A light and single-edged curved blade that became one of the symbols of the corps.

RISE OF THE JANISSARIES

It is impossible to chart the exact growth of Janissary numbers, though one respected study places the numbers as follows:



Janissaries favoured the arquebus when firearms became readily available

Training

Once marched to the Ottoman capital – a test in itself – the boys were circumcised and converted to Islam. Most did this willingly and conversion back to Christianity was rare. They were then tested to discover their best potential, the brightest being selected for the palace schools and future jobs in the Ottoman palaces or civil service.

Those not selected for such lofty positions were marked for military duties and were hired out to Turkish villagers for up to seven years. After this service, they were then packed off to the training crops, with the majority trained for the regular infantry, learning weapon skills and strict discipline, as well as mathematics. Some of the more promising were selected for education in the households of powerful families, where they were taught more technical skills such as gunnery and carriage driving.

The barrack life instilled a sense of loyalty among the recruits, who also acted as policemen and firemen when the main military bodies were away on campaign. They had the tradition of regimental life drummed into them during these formative years, swearing loyalty to their fellows upon a tray that contained salt, a Quran and a sword, though their ultimate fealty belonged to the sultan. Across the empire they were his eyes, his ears and his ultimate fighting machine.

THE FALL OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Though masters of the surrounding landscape, the toppling of Constantinople proved a symbolic victory for the Ottomans

It was Mehmet the Conqueror who launched the final assault on Constantinople and brought the last vestige of a once-mighty empire into the Ottoman fold. Though the city had long proved little more than a vassal state, he coveted the glory its fall would bring. Succeeding to the Sultanate in 1451, he swiftly mobilised his armies and picked off remaining Byzantine possessions along the Black Sea coast. In 1452, he erected a castle on the European shore of the Bosphorus, opposite a Turkish castle on the Asiatic shore, taking strategic command of this vital waterway.

The Turks now controlled all shipping in and out of the Black Sea, and Mehmet's artillery were quick to sink a Venetian ship that defied his order to halt. Mehmet beheaded the crew and impaled the captain, Antonio Rizzi. "As Rizzi's body mouldered in the rain," writes one historian, "the Byzantines made their last, desperate appeals to the West." With the great trading states of Genoa, Venice and Ragusa deeply involved in mercantile activity with the Ottomans, and at odds among themselves, they offered little in the way of support to the Byzantines. The Holy Roman emperor issued a stern warning to Mehmet, but it fell on deaf ears. The sultan had a warning of his own: the Byzantines should leave the city by 5 March 1453, or suffer his wrath.

The attack

It has been said that Mehmet rallied the whole of his empire for the assault on Christendom's most easterly outcrop, and if figures of 300,000 men seem exaggerated, the forces assembled outside Constantinople's walls certainly dwarfed those inside, perhaps numbering as few as 12,000.

As the vast Turkish fleet sailed into the Sea of Marmara, a frightening weapon of war was uncovered before the city's outermost walls - a 28-foot cannon with the bronze of its barrel said to be eight inches thick. It had to be dragged into position by 700 men and 60 oxen.

Constantinople's stone defences were almost as formidable, comprising two sets of mighty walls dotted with towers. The emperor also ordered a mighty chain to be slung along the entrance to the Golden Horn, preventing any Turkish ships from launching an assault on the inner sea walls.

The Turks found the opening days difficult, their artillery proving less effective than they'd hoped against the city's lofty walls, while their siege towers were set ablaze and mining efforts repulsed. To add further insult, in April a small flotilla of supply ships successfully ran the Turkish blockade and safely entered the Golden Horn.

Mehmet upped his game and soon pulled off an extraordinary feat of engineering, building a wooden roadway from the Bosphorus to the Springs - over which he hauled 70 ships that took to the Golden Horn. He could now mount sea-borne assaults from much closer quarters.

On 29 May 1453, Mehmet launched his most intense assault, a simultaneous attack from land and sea, his Janissaries achieving the final victory as they pressed through a breached wall. It is presumed the brave Byzantine emperor, Constantine, died while rallying his men.

With the city at the Ottomans' mercy, Mehmet allowed three days of looting and thousands of civilians were dragged off into slavery before the sultan took ownership of this renowned city and began its reconstruction as a Muslim metropolis.

Why was the Ottoman Empire so successful?

A STANDING ARMY

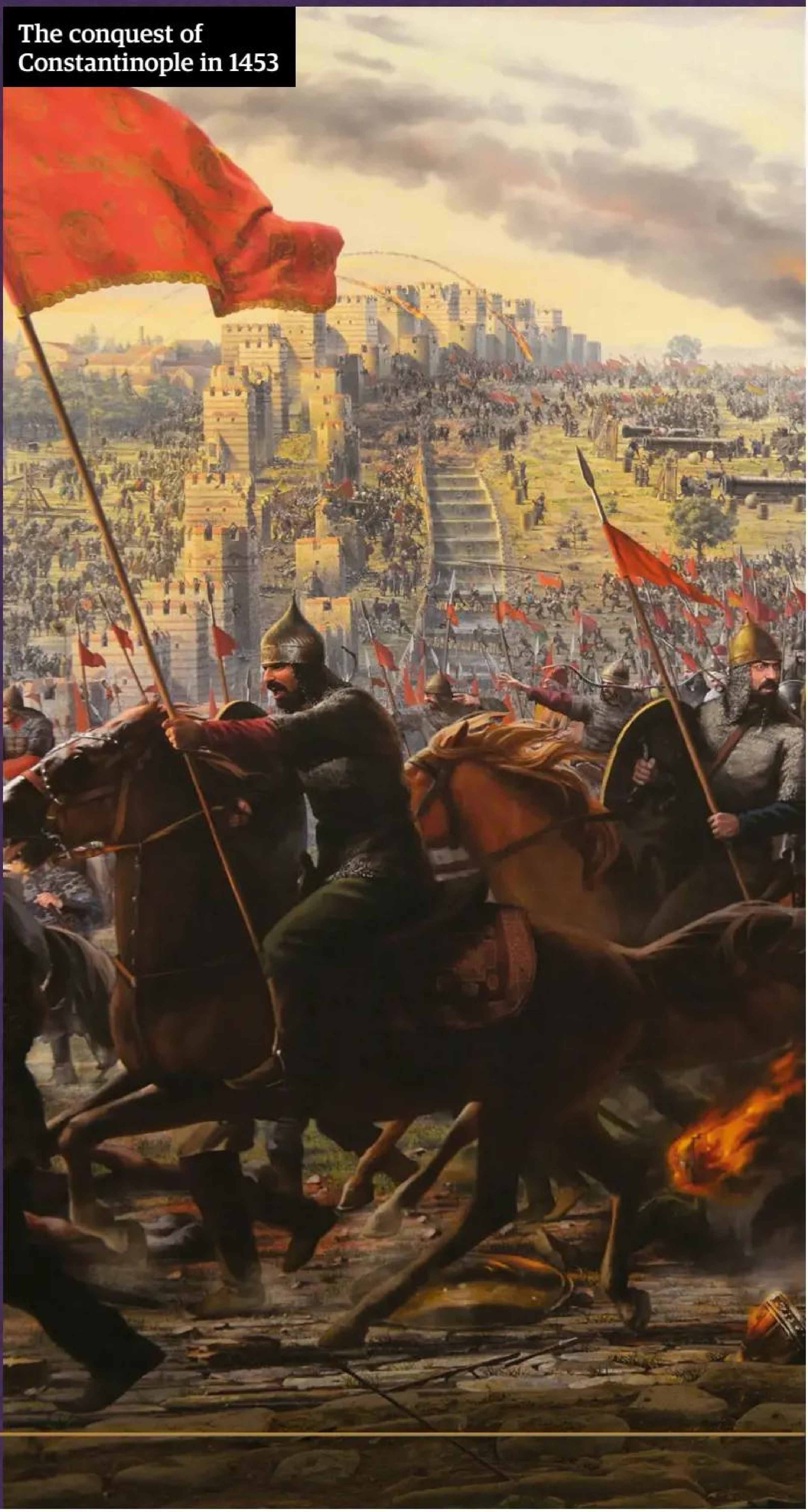
1 The Ottomans were the first since the Roman Empire to maintain a professional army with a brilliant logistical supply chain. While European rulers had to coax their squabbling lords into combat, the Ottomans could call into action a well-oiled war machine.

EXCELLENT MORALE

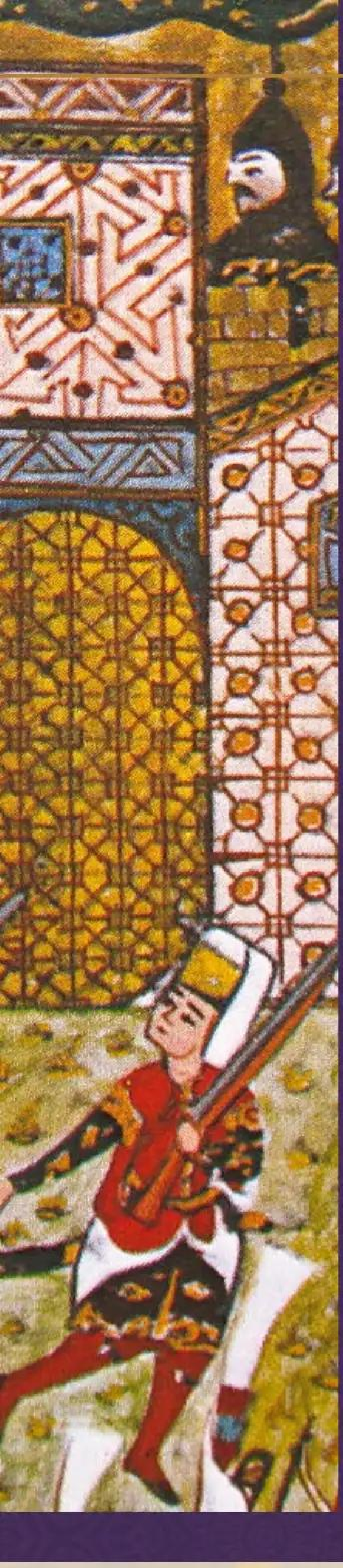
2 The Ottoman army contained the Janissaries, who lived for war, while their other troops were often motivated by a religious fervour that demanded they wage war against the infidel. Their leaders successfully analysed strategy and tactics, and kept morale high.

FLEXIBLE GOVERNANCE

3 While heavy-handed in conquest, the Ottomans were light-handed in governance, tolerating different religious dominations where conversion proved too difficult. They also maintained local laws and customs so that their subjects would better fuel the Ottoman war machine.



The conquest of Constantinople in 1453



Bombardment begins 6 April

1 The Ottomans dig in along the Theodosian land wall and employ heavy artillery to batter the Byzantine defences, while the sappers bid to mine beneath the great towers. The Ottomans also use siege towers that loom higher than the city walls in an effort to destroy the defences.

A flotilla arrives 20 April

2 Three papal galleys and a Byzantine transport laden with corn from Sicily and other essential supplies take advantage of good winds to run across the Sea of Marmara. Turkish vessels bid to engage. A lethal game of cat and mouse ensues until finally the Christians reach the Golden Horn and are able to restock Constantinople.

Ships sail overland 22 April

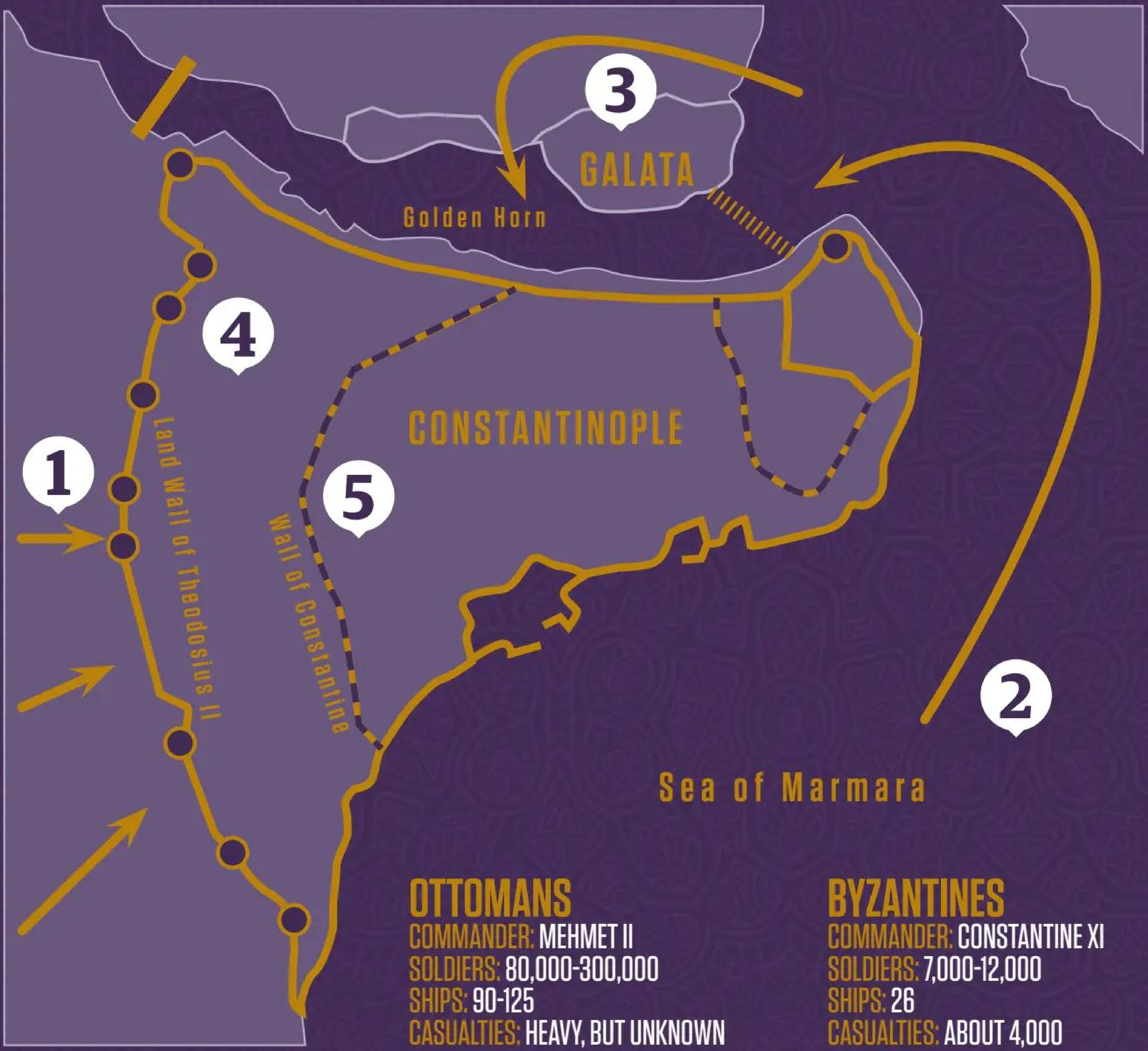
3 Mehmet transports more than 70 vessels overland and into a river feeding the Golden Horn north. A surprise attack against this newly ensconced fleet goes awry and costs the Christians many lives, which they can ill afford to lose.

Final battle 28 May

4 The weakened walls in the northwest suffer the brunt of an initial attack though Mehmet's levies, and Anatolian infantry are beaten back by frenzied Christian defence. A final attack by the elite Janissaries finally turns the tide.

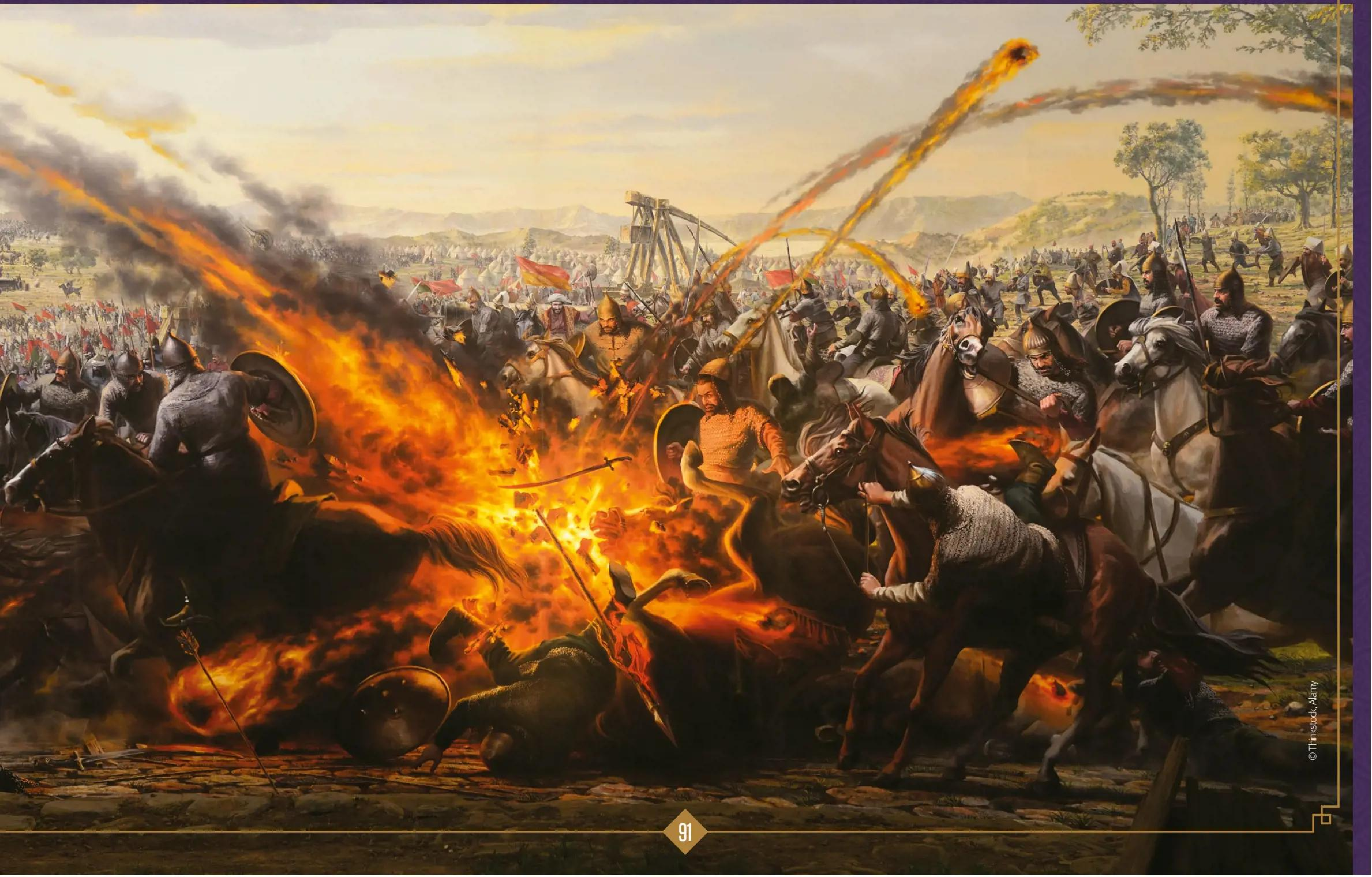
The city falls 29 May

5 The Ottomans break through, with the Circus Gate breached, and the emperor is forced to fall back to the inner walls. Many commentators claim that he is killed in battle while leading the final doomed counter attack.



OTTOMANS
COMMANDER: MEHMET II
SOLDIERS: 80,000-300,000
SHIPS: 90-125
CASUALTIES: HEAVY, BUT UNKNOWN

BYZANTINES
COMMANDER: CONSTANTINE XI
SOLDIERS: 7,000-12,000
SHIPS: 26
CASUALTIES: ABOUT 4,000



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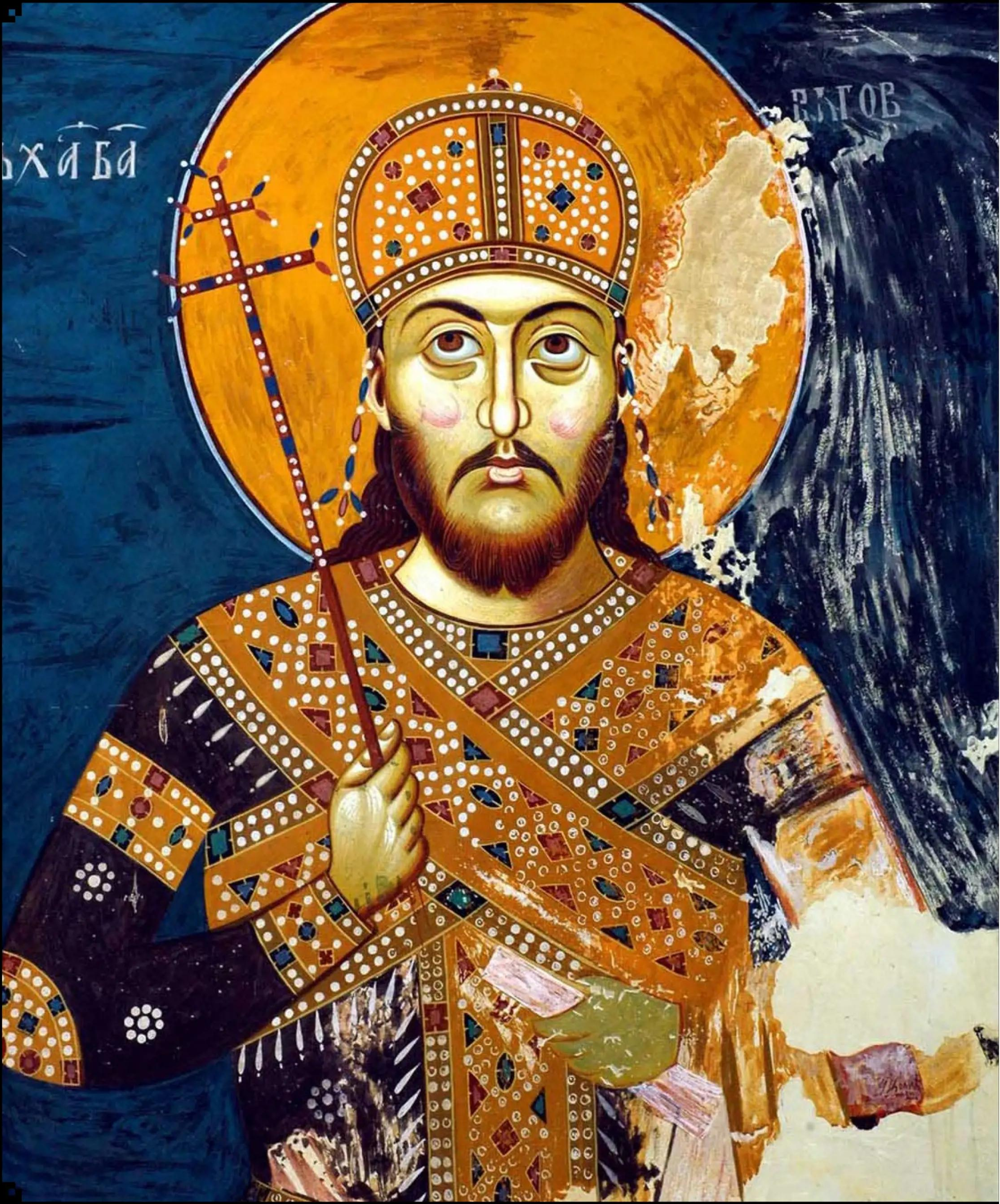
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THE SERBIAN EMPIRE

Over 17 years of subterfuge and siege warfare, Dušan the Mighty transformed Serbia from a Balkan backwater to one of the most powerful empires in Europe

Written by James Hoare

Viewed from the outside, the brief history of the Medieval Serbian Empire is really little more than a footnote in the torturous decline of Byzantine Greece and the seemingly unstoppable rise of Ottoman Turkey. But from the inside it's a seismic achievement that birthed a Church, a culture, a mythology and a sense of statehood that still binds a people.

The Balkans were the traditional domain of the Byzantine Empire, which, even as its grip began to wane, still cast a light of power and prestige over the scattered principalities and petty domains of its mountainous northern hinterland. Also known as the Eastern Roman Empire, like its Western counterpart it found itself beset by 'barbarians' – Slavs and Bulgars had migrated into Byzantium's periphery in the 6th and 7th centuries, pushing back what had once been recognisably Romano-Greek culture and civilisation. Over the second half of the 12th century and the first half of the 13th, the Nemanjić dynasty transformed Serbia. They elevated themselves from an acrimonious gaggle of competing tribes to a recognisable Medieval state through exploiting mineral wealth, forging trade links, building alliances, and clumsily emulating Byzantium's rituals and religious rites.

The Nemanjićs navigated the fragile balance of power between seemingly incompatible neighbours and creeds – Roman Catholicism from the north and west and Eastern Orthodoxy from the south and east – so deftly that the pope elevated the Grand Župan to the status of king. Stefan Nemanjić became Stefan the First-Crowned courtesy of a papal legate at the same time as his brother, Saint Sava, became the first head of a self-governing Serbian Orthodox Church.

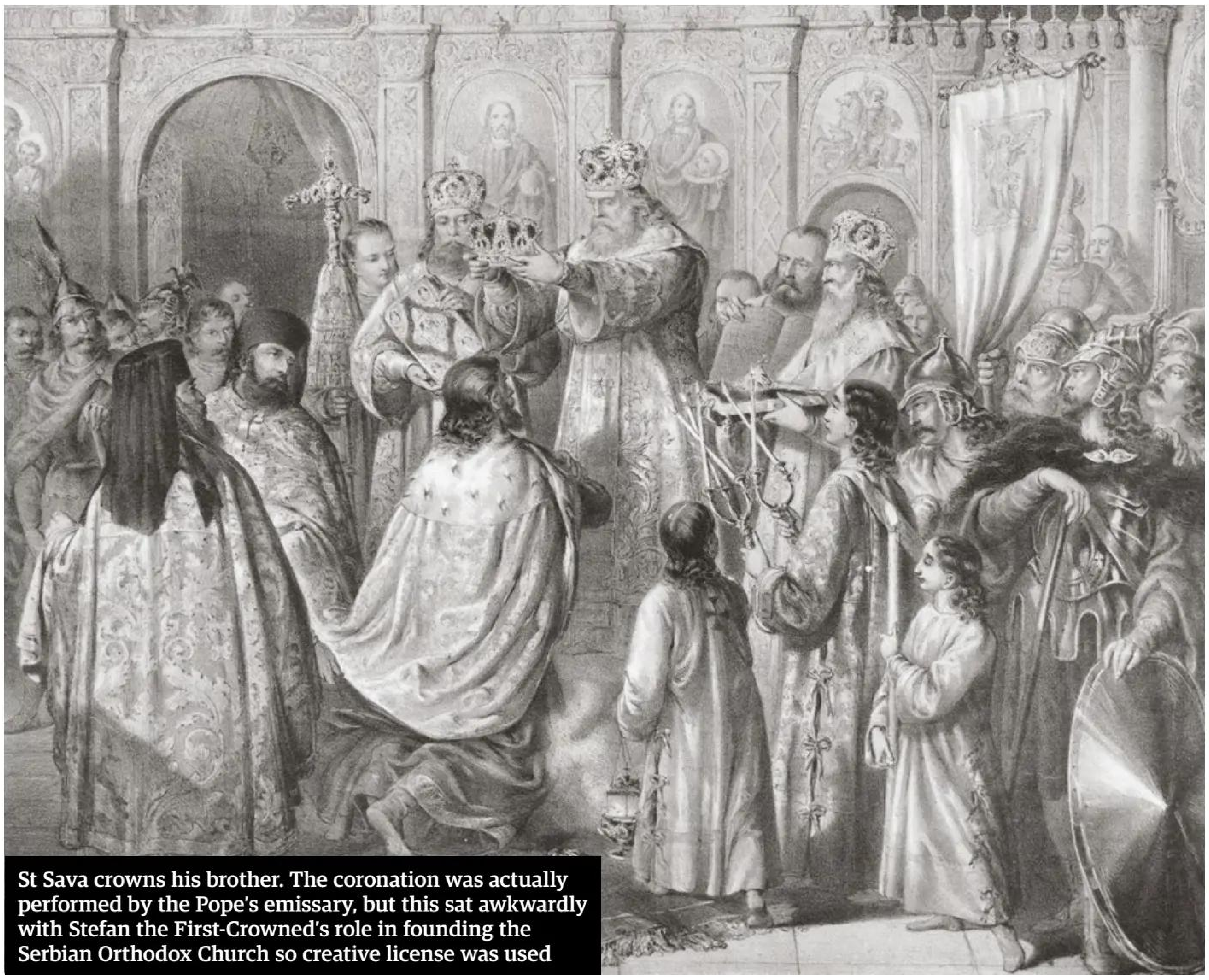
With a symbiotic relationship linking the Nemanjić kings to the Serbian Church, most of the dynasty have been elevated to sainthood with one glaring exception: the greatest of them all. Dušan the Mighty set his sights on eclipsing Byzantium by declaring himself "Emperor of the Serbs and Greeks" in 1346, separating the Serbian Church from Constantinople by elevating his own patriarchy. Only a patriarch could crown an emperor, and the patriarch of Constantinople – the religious leader of the Orthodox world – certainly wasn't going to oblige. But what ended up tarnishing the halo of the greatest of Serbia's Medieval monarchs and the midwife of the Serbian patriarchate was patricide.

The son of Stefan Dečanski, who had been blinded and exiled for attempting to overthrow his own father (Dušan's grandfather), Stefan Milutin, Stefan Dušan grew up in exile in the imperial court. In Constantinople, the young prince received the finest possible education and gained a deep understanding of Byzantine culture and traditions.

In 1320, Dečanski and Milutin were reconciled, just in time for the king to die and the prodigal son to make a successful bid for the throne. Dečanski claimed to have been miraculously healed and had his vision restored rendering him suitable to rule, although some still suspect he was never fully blind to begin with.

Dušan played enforcer, successfully leading Serbia's armies against the Second Bulgarian Empire in 1330 to secure a chunk of Macedonia. Following the Battle of Velbuzd, the nobles clamoured for more aggressive action against Byzantium too, growing frustrated by Dečanski's conciliatory attitude. Dušan agreed with them and perhaps thinking they had a more malleable monarch in the son than the half-blind father, they backed the challenger.

Dušan raised an army and had the old man put to death. The new king immediately put his allies in their place, suppressing a provincial uprising in Zeta from local lords who were expecting to get their way. But they had backed a warlord, and



St Sava crowns his brother. The coronation was actually performed by the Pope's emissary, but this sat awkwardly with Stefan the First-Crowned's role in founding the Serbian Orthodox Church so creative license was used

"On 15 June 1341, the emperor died, and almost immediately an ad-hoc invasion force advanced towards Thessaloniki"

they got one. Calculating and aggressive where his father had been pious and cautious, Dušan restored relations with Bulgaria, preventing a dangerous Byzantine-Bulgarian alliance that might trap them in a vice, and maintained constant pressure on Hungary, ensuring its knights were forced to pay dearly for any sallies across the Danube. Where he relaxed his grip was in the west, his neighbours in the Banate of Bosnia, who had seized his lands in what is now Herzegovina, and the Republic of Ragusa (now Dubrovnik), which had increased its sphere further inland and along the coast.

Pragmatically, Dušan knew that restoring these provinces would change little on the ground. Local lords simply accepted the sovereignty of whoever raised the flag at any given time and life continued as normal. Ragusa was Serbia's gateway for trade from the Adriatic, and a war would be easily won but the economic cost would be great. Better instead to march south, and Byzantine instability provided the perfect opportunity. The local governor Syrgiannes had conspired against Emperor Andronikos III Palaiologos and fled to the Serbian court, using his inside knowledge to lead Dušan's forces to victory in claiming all Macedonia and pushing on to lay siege to Thessaloniki. There Syrgiannes was lured away from the Serbian camp by a Byzantine defector and murdered – a traitor poetically slain by a man posing as one.

The emperor offered terms. He would recognise the Macedonian conquests but not those in Greece, and Dušan accepted – without the rebel's insights and allies, battles would be hard-fought. In a state of near-constant warfare in the east, Andronikos III sought to appease Serbia's belligerent monarch and over a seven-day summit crafted a peace that would hold until the emperor's death in 1341.

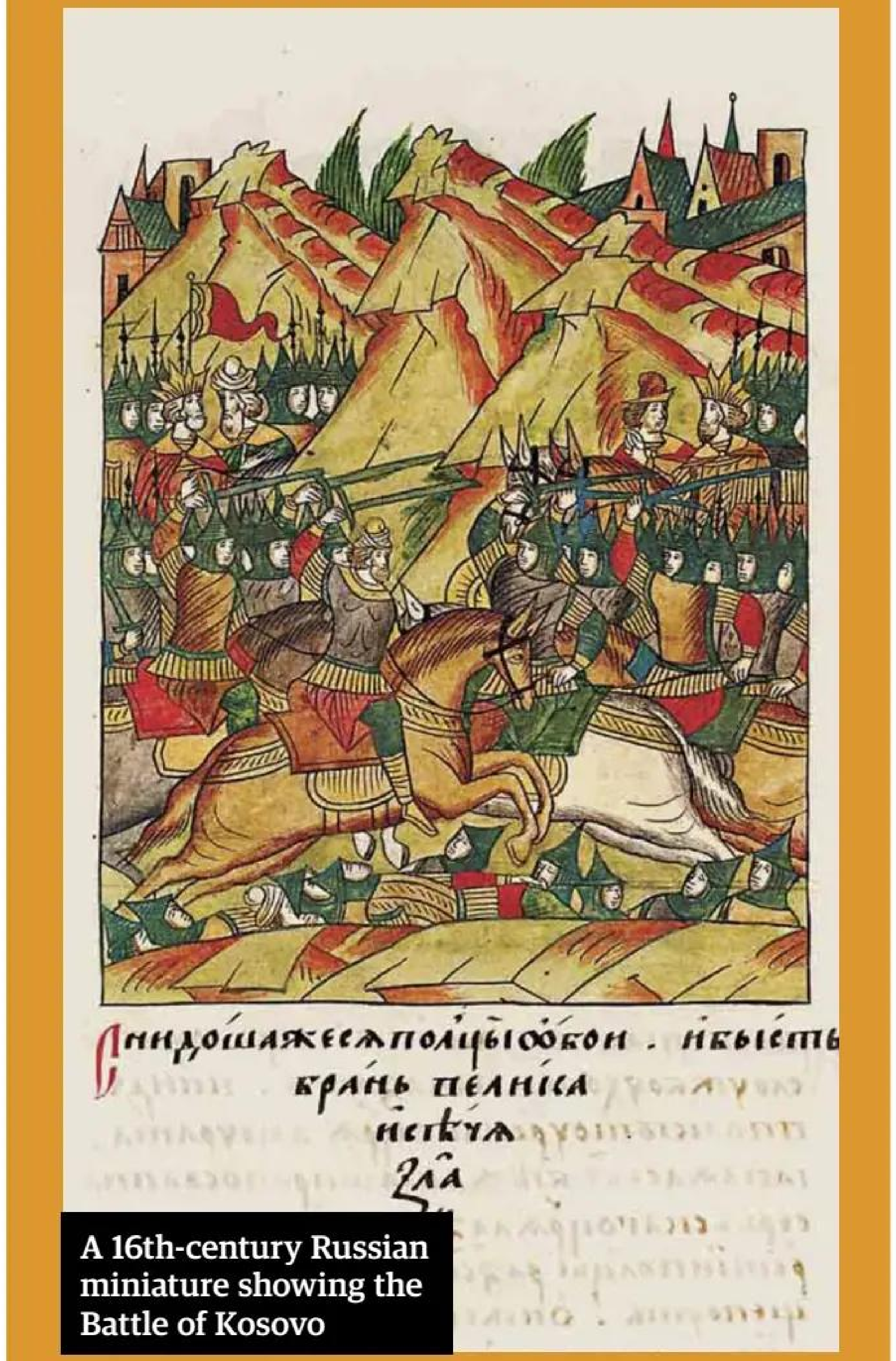
Dušan looked to Albania instead. Though formally a Byzantine province, this had crumbled into a fiction under pressure from Serbia, and along the coast, the Republic of Venice and the Kingdom of Sicily. Its tribal chieftains were easily suppressed, but records are unclear on just how much of this feral land Dušan's armies managed to tame.

On 15 June 1341, the emperor died and almost immediately an ad-hoc invasion force advanced towards Thessaloniki. But Dušan wasn't the only jackal circling the carcass – Turkish pirates plundered the Greek coast and Albanian tribes rose up against the Byzantine yoke.

Andronikos III's heir, John V, was only nine, and so the old emperor's closest ally John Kantakouzenos was appointed regent to rule in his name. While away from Constantinople, a coup was launched and the child's mother, Anna of Savoy, was appointed regent instead. Outraged, Kantakouzenos declared himself emperor and Byzantium erupted into civil war.

MYTH AND MEMORY

The rise and fall of Medieval Serbia is preserved through epic poetry



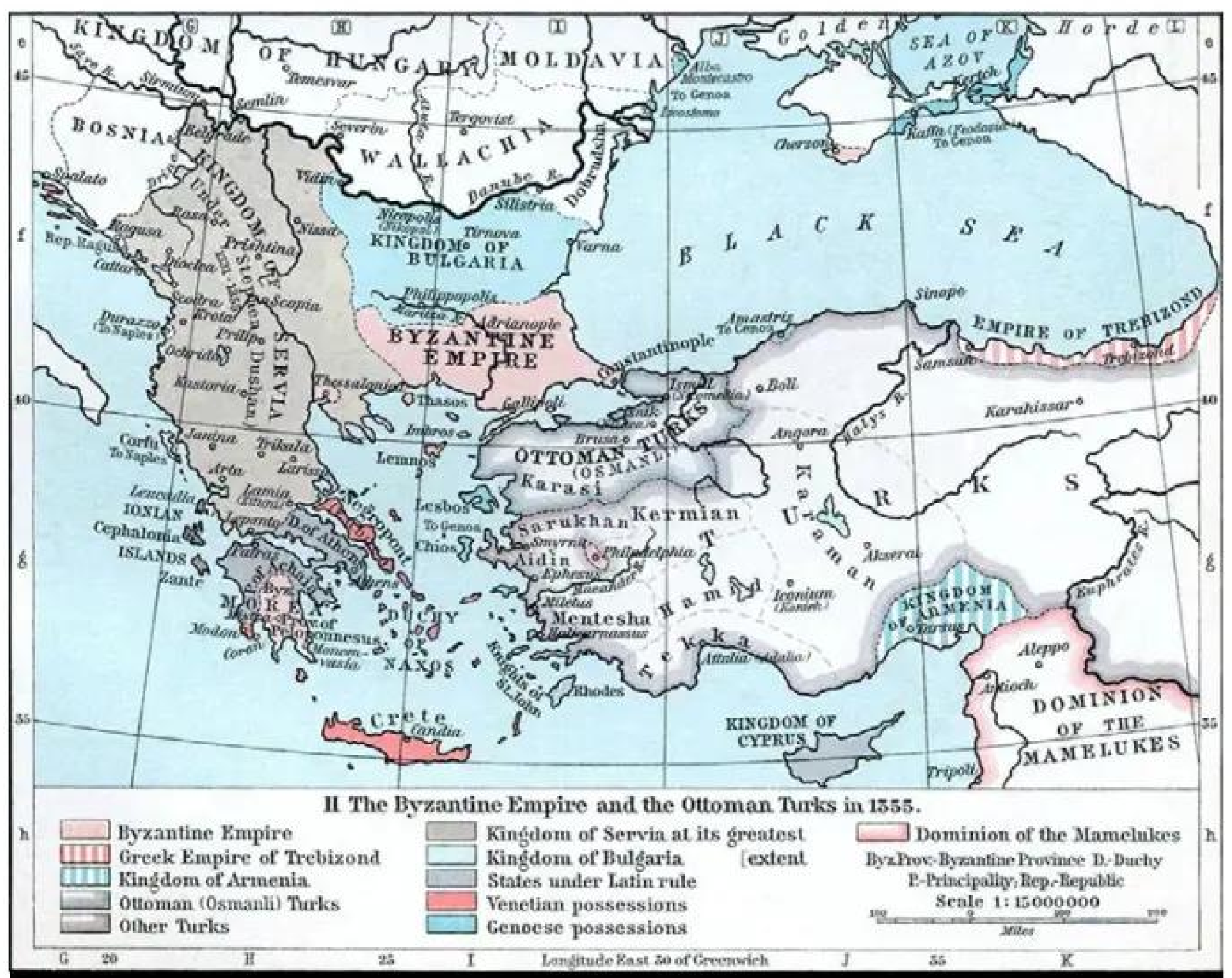
A 16th-century Russian miniature showing the Battle of Kosovo

The story of Serbia's Medieval glory, its heroes, its battles and its fall, were preserved for ordinary people by epic poems, written to be sung accompanied by a stringed instrument called a gusle. Though the tales became embellished, these legends – along with the unique character and continuity of the Serbian Orthodox Church – kept Serbian identity going during the long, dark centuries of Ottoman occupation.

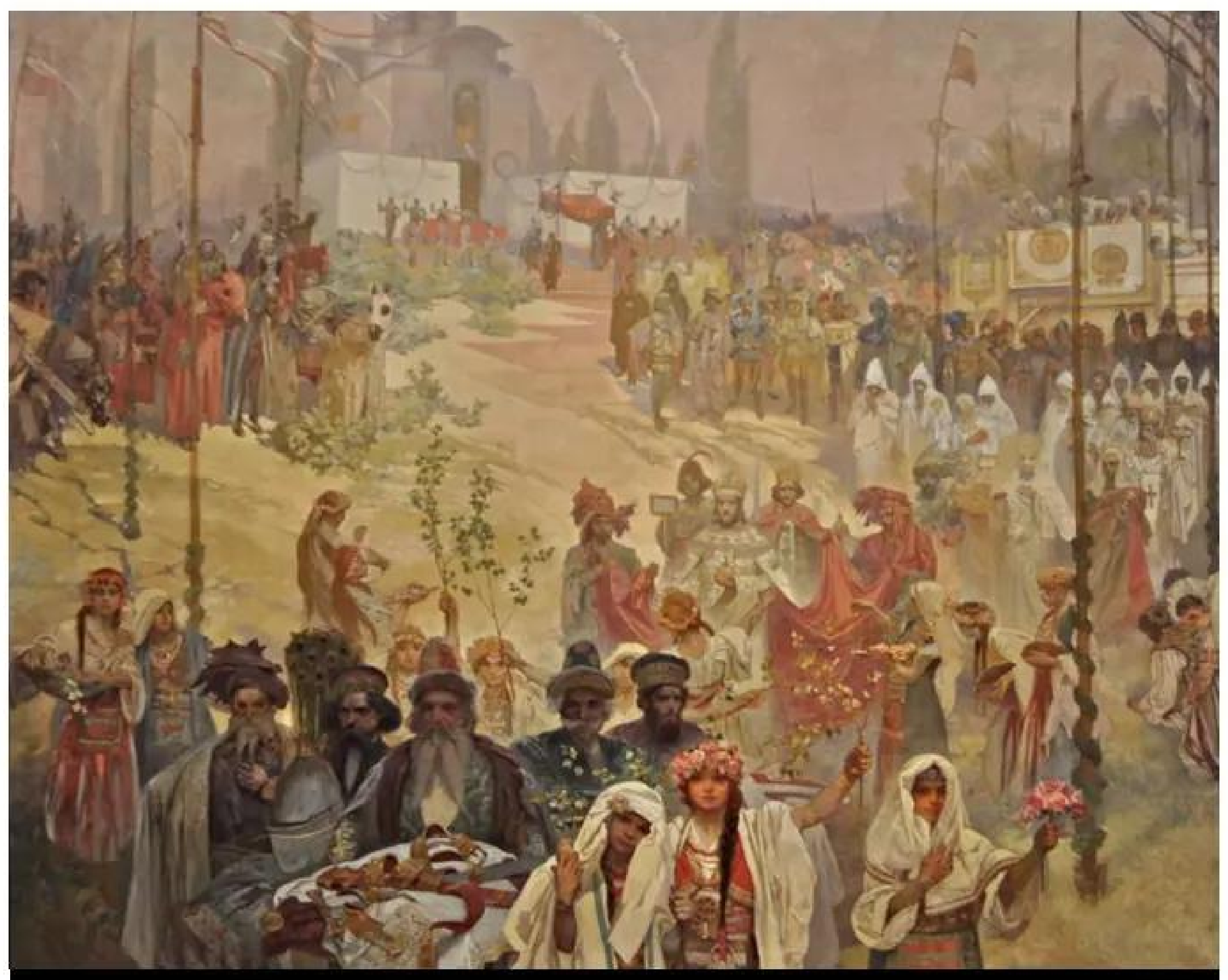
The best-known body of work is the 'Kosovo Cycle', which details events in the decades following Dušan's death when the divided Serbian nobles won a pyrrhic victory over the Ottomans at the 1389 Battle of Kosovo, ending with the death of both Sultan Murad I and Lazar Hrebeljanović, the 'Heavenly Prince' who led an outnumbered coalition of Serbs, Bosnians and Knights Hospitaller. Both armies were all but obliterated, and when the Turks returned the following year the Serbian statelets were unable to muster significant resistance.

Though the events of the battle aren't recorded in any detail, Lazar's sacrifice – recognised by the Serbian Orthodox Church as a martyrdom – remains a potent clarion call in Serbian nationalism.

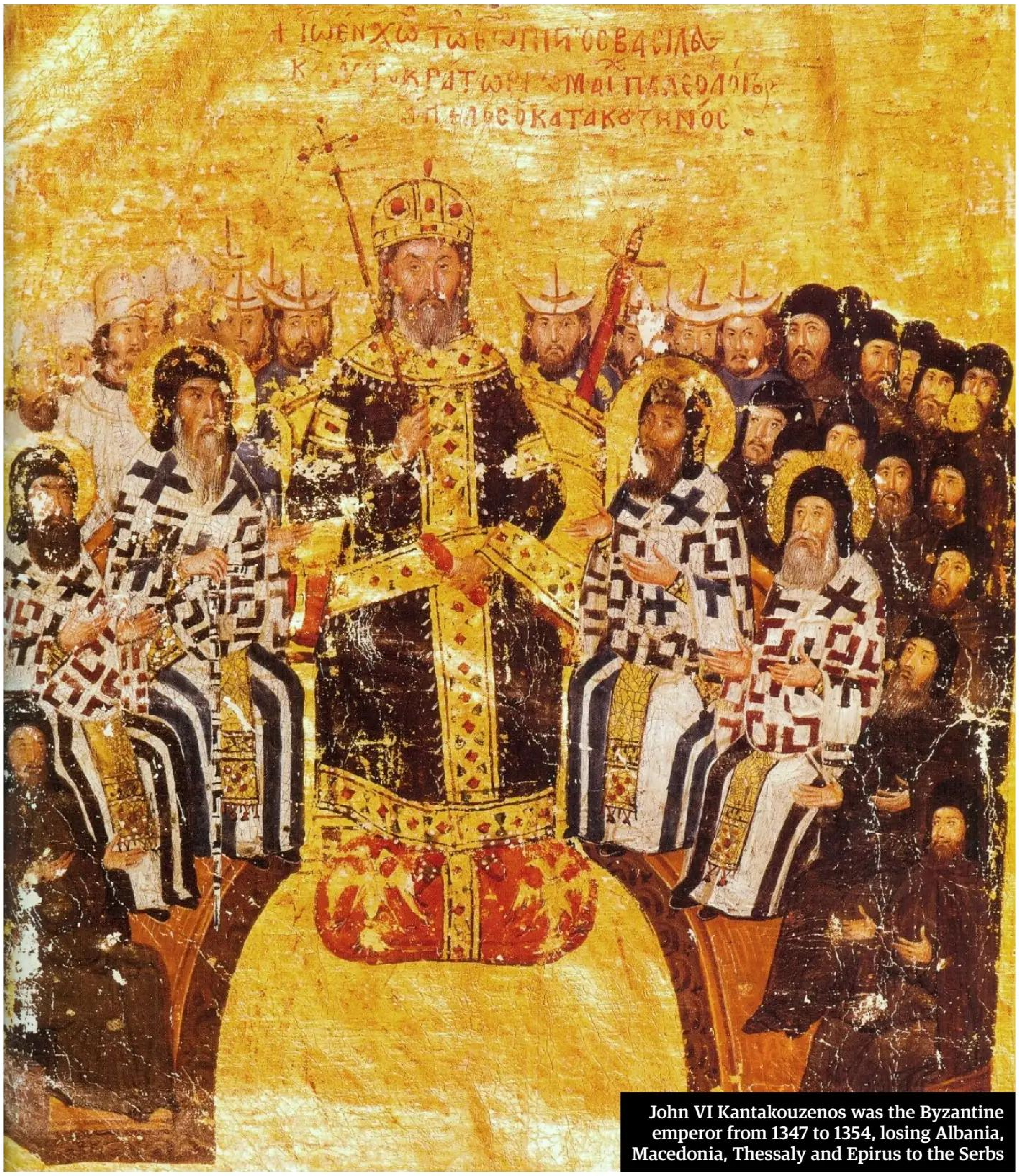
Desperate to restore control, Kantakouzenos was forced to make a deal with the devil. In July 1342, Dušan agreed to fight with him in exchange for Dušan taking all Byzantine territory west of Thessaloniki and keeping any cities the Serbs happened to capture during the campaign. But as John VI's position improved, Dušan felt his leverage over the pretender slipping. The grandstanding Greek had stolen a town out from under the nose of its Serbian besiegers by marching in and accepting



This map shows the extent of the Serbian Empire by Dušan's death in 1355, dwarfing the once-mighty Byzantine Empire



A depiction of Dušan's coronation as emperor of the Serbs and Greeks by Czech artist Alfons Mucha as part of his series depicting great moments in Slavic history



John VI Kantakouzenos was the Byzantine emperor from 1347 to 1354, losing Albania, Macedonia, Thessaly and Epirus to the Serbs

the surrender, effectively placing it under his own control without doing any of the fighting. Dušan struck a deal with Anna of Savoy instead and switched sides.

Kantakouzenos made his second Faustian pact. Unbelievably, he enlisted the support of the Ottoman Turks and moved the war to Thrace, effectively abandoning the west to Dušan. By 1345, the Serbs held all of Greek Macedonia – apart from Thessaloniki itself – and all of Albania, apart from the port city of Durrës.

Mount Athos, the most important monastic site in Greek Orthodoxy, now lay under the rule of a foreign king, but Dušan courted favour. He asked to be recognised in their prayers alongside the Byzantine emperor and gifted the individual monasteries with lands and exempted them from taxes. Despite fierce protests from Constantinople, the holy fathers of Athos repaid Dušan's largess and appointed Serbia's archbishop to the role of patriarch. On Easter Day 1436, surrounded by churchmen from Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria, Dušan was crowned emperor.

He certainly looked the part. Described as handsome, charismatic and unnaturally tall, it might have had the touch of folklore were it not for an analysis of his vertebrae in 1991 that concluded the Serbian emperor was well over 2.13 metres (seven feet) tall. He had 101 knights for his bodyguard who had to match their master's stature – a 40-kilogram (88-pound) banner belonging to his retinue strongly suggests that the standard bearer would have had to be taller than even Dušan to carry it comfortably.

Eventually, Kantakouzenos emerged victorious over the rogue regency and in May 1347 was formally crowned in Constantinople, with John V as co-emperor. Byzantine strength was short-lived. Plague struck in 1347 and 1348, and Dušan followed its pestilent wake south to take Thessaly and Epirus, repopulating them with Albanian migrants. Kantaouzenos attempted to recover Byzantium's Balkan frontier in 1350, but made little progress, and in 1352 civil war returned when John V came of age and concluded that he shouldn't have to share what was his by right.

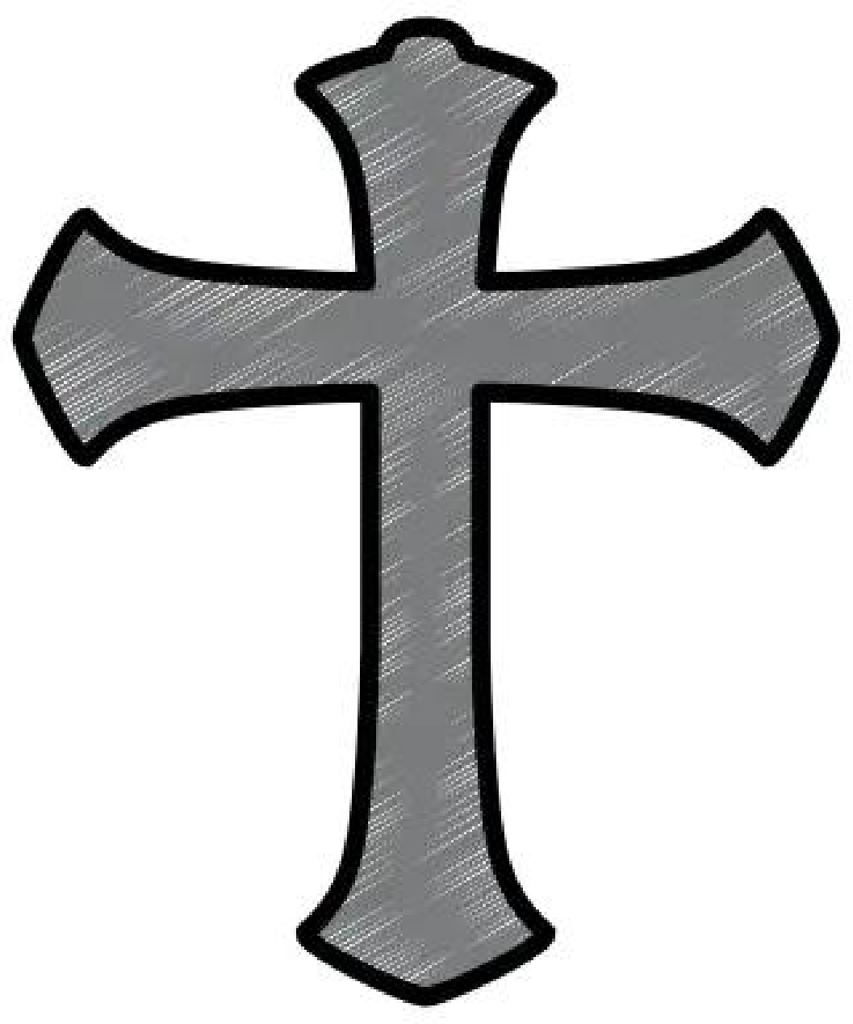
Empires need managing, not just conquering. In 1349 Dušan anchored the secular and spiritual life of his Serbian domain with a comprehensive law code that covered almost every aspect of life. Under the watchful eye of loyal Serbian governors and garrisons, he retained the familiar Byzantine administration in his Greek lands and the Greek elite remained in their posts, just as he left the Albanian chieftains to rule as they saw fit so long as they paid all due deference.

Dušan's mightiest endeavours, however, were cut short with his death. He had built strong links with the pope – having alienated the Orthodox world by anointing himself emperor he sought spiritual patrons in Rome and hoped to be declared leader of a great crusade against the encroaching Ottoman Turks. He never surrendered his dream of storming the walls of Constantinople and ruling the Greeks not just in name, but in right.

Perhaps Dušan's empire might have held out longer against the Ottomans and perhaps he might have found more eager allies in that cause than the haughty Byzantines, but it wasn't to be. He died suddenly in 1355 and two decades after his death, Serbia was smaller than it had been when he became king, having been pulled apart by his weak successor and feuding nobles.

By 1390, Serbia was merely another satellite of the Ottoman Empire and would remain so for the next 488 years.

© Getty Images



THE PORTUGUESE EMPIRE

Rising from small beginnings and built on ingenuity, Portugal was the envy of the early modern world, leading to rivalries that fuelled its decline

Written by June Woolerton

As the year 1890 got underway, Portugal was given an ultimatum. For centuries, Britain, along with France and the Netherlands, had been attempting to erode what remained of Portuguese imperial power. Now, as the 19th century entered its final decade, the British Ultimatum demanded that Lisbon give up its plans to link two of its remaining colonies, Angola and Mozambique, on land that London claimed as its own. This diplomatic skirmish would lead to major social and political change in Portugal and prove to be the fatal blow to an empire that had once been hailed as the greatest global power of them all.

The pressure was nothing new. From the 17th century onwards, Portugal had found the many different parts of its imperial holdings under attack from European rivals who wanted a share of the wealth and power it had won itself through its dominions, which spread through Africa, Asia, the Pacific and the Americas. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, its power began to decline and fragment as the Dutch and British encroached on Portuguese postings around India as they sought to grab a bigger share of the lucrative trade routes there. Lisbon, which had once led the world in conquest, was reluctantly turning into a bit-part player on the global stage.

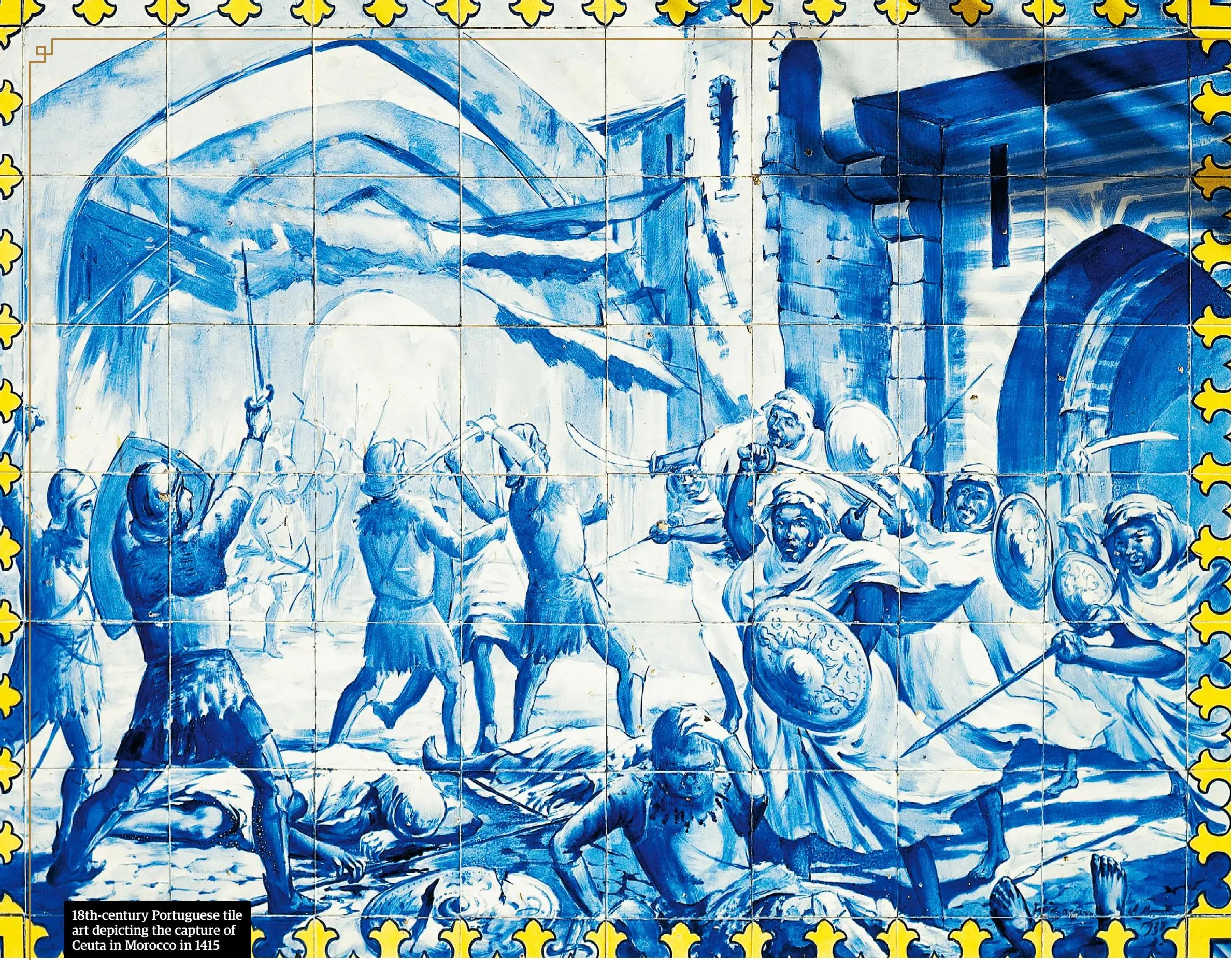
But then Portugal had been very far from a major power when it first began to expand beyond its borders in the early 15th century. In August 1415, the ambitious King John I and three of his sons led a raid on Ceuta on the very tip of northern Africa. It was an important trading post and of huge strategic importance as it sat facing Europe. Once Ceuta was captured, the royal regime struggled briefly to know what to do with it, but it soon became a starting point for exploration along the African coast with John's son, Henry, leading the push for discovery. He, like others, wanted to expand his horizons, but as a leading member of the ruling House, he also knew that Portugal needed and wanted better trade to improve its standing in the world.

The main impetus for this expansion was a desire to tap into lucrative businesses like spice and sugar, which were reaping benefits for other European powers who bought and sold along trade routes through the Middle East. Portugal needed another entry into this world of riches and found it in 1434 when one of Henry's sailors, Gil Eanes, successfully navigated the mysterious Cape Bojador on the west coast of Africa, a first for a European. His boss, known as Henry the Navigator, was also influential in the development of new technologies, including the faster and lighter ships called caravels, and suddenly a new world of discovery opened up.

Expeditions began to flood out of Portugal, pushing further and further south along the African coast and establishing settlements as they went. They also headed west and by 1462, the Cape Verde Islands off the African coast had been found and settled. They became a major post in the transatlantic slave trade.

Around the same time, an earlier conquest, Madeira, started to take a big chunk of the lucrative sugar trade while another holding, the Azores in the mid-Atlantic, brought in profits through wheat production. By the time Bartolomeu Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope in 1488, opening up the possibility of trade with Asia, Portugal had established a network of forts and trading posts along the African coast, which became bases for trade in everything from gold to humans.

But what Portugal really wanted was a base in the Indies. When Christopher Columbus came back from his 1492 voyage of discovery for the Spanish monarchs, the Portuguese king became convinced his neighbours would steal his thunder. The 1494 Treaty of Torsedillas carved up the world outside Europe between Portugal and Spain along an imaginary line set 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands. And within a few years, the Portuguese were speeding southwards again to try and beat their rivals to India.



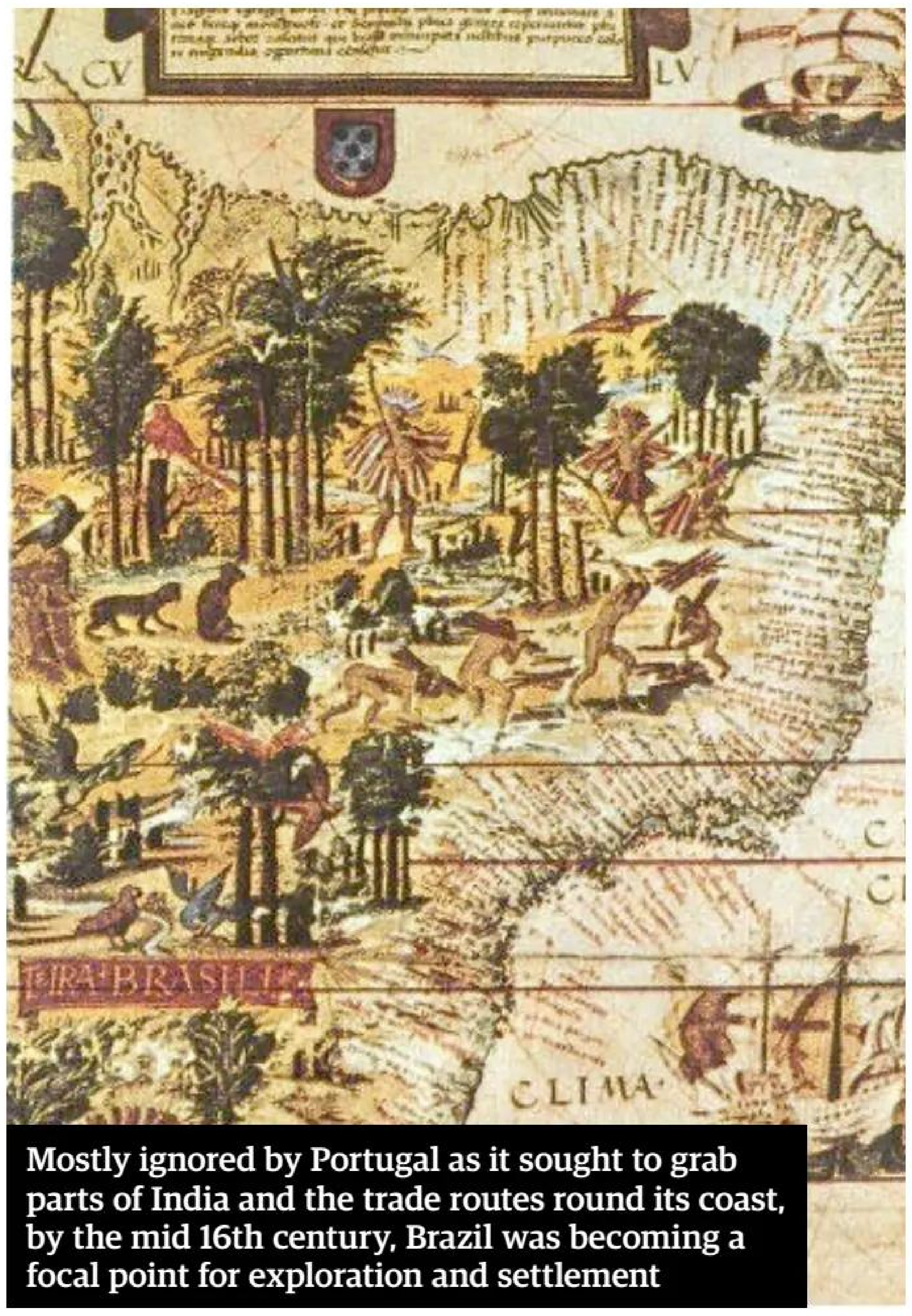
18th-century Portuguese tile art depicting the capture of Ceuta in Morocco in 1415

Vasco da Gama set sail in the São Gabriel on 8 July 1497, and as the year came to an end, rounded the Cape of Good Hope. On 20 May 1498, da Gama stepped ashore in Calicut in Kerala, becoming the first European to sail to India. His achievement brought him great personal glory, but it also began the most successful years of the Portuguese Empire as the long-desired trade routes with India finally became reality. Over the next few years, ports were established throughout the country and trade in goods like pepper and cinnamon thrived.

Meanwhile, Pedro Álvares Cabral had sailed his Portuguese fleet to the east coast of South America, arriving there in 1500. The land he found was filled with a wood the conquerors called pau-brasil and soon the commodity had given its name to their new holding. Portugal, the little kingdom that had first looked to expand less than a century earlier, was now in control of a huge network of trade routes linking the extensive holdings that now made up its empire. In 1502, the new imperial power created the cartaz, a licensing system aimed at protecting ships from rivals and pirates.

By then, Portugal's interest in expansion had gone beyond trade and money. Even its earliest foray into foreign waters had held other, lesser, motivations but now these became increasingly important as it flexed its muscles on the world stage. The spread of Christianity became more of a focal point, as did opposition to other faiths, including Islam. Portugal also looked to colonise larger and larger areas and impose its own administration on them. All this came together as it sought to secure its place in India.

Afonso de Albuquerque had helped to conquer the entrance to the Red Sea for Portugal in 1506 and set about trying to close off the Indian Ocean to preserve his country's monopoly there. That brought him into conflict with the Ottoman Empire, leading to a series of wars that would see him score some famous victories. Within two years of his appointment in 1509 as Portuguese viceroy in India, Albuquerque had captured Goa and Malacca for his country and set up expeditions to explore Indonesia. Timor was discovered in 1512. Soon afterwards, the first Portuguese forays into China took place, although they soon descended into chaos, leading to the killing of explorers and a retreat. However, the empire became the first European power to set up trade routes with both



Mostly ignored by Portugal as it sought to grab parts of India and the trade routes round its coast, by the mid 16th century, Brazil was becoming a focal point for exploration and settlement

China and Japan as its influence grew even further over the following years.

French threats to Brazil spurred a new wave of settlement there with towns springing up throughout the 1530s as Portugal sought to consolidate its position. For a period in the early 16th century, the Portuguese Empire seemed all but invincible. It conquered new territories in the Persian Gulf and across India, and claimed the Moluccas Islands after a series of battles with its main imperial rival, Spain. By the middle of the 16th century, Portugal controlled trade routes between Europe and Asia and within areas including India and large parts of Africa.

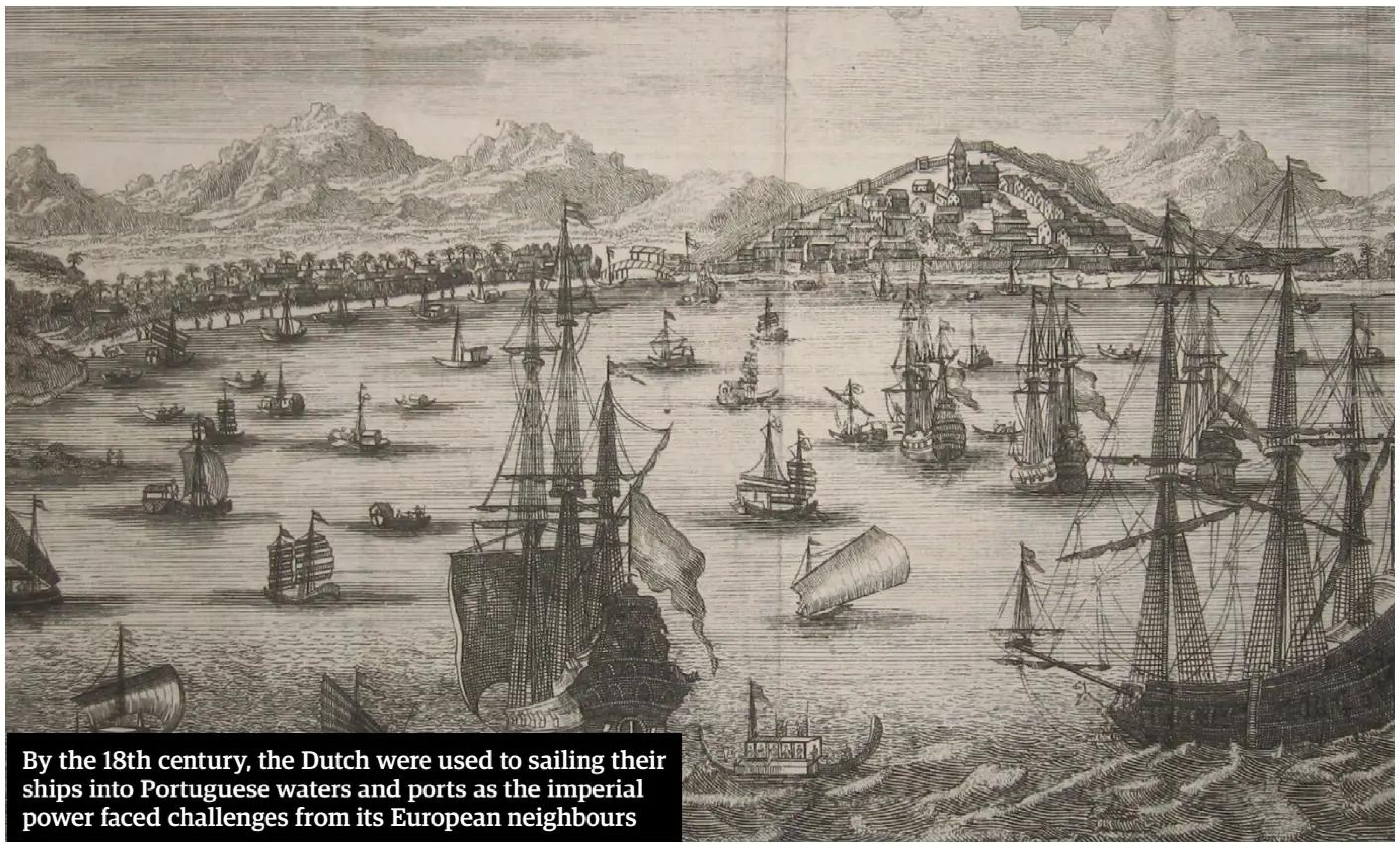
The empire made the kings of Portugal very rich, but as the 16th century wore on, it also made them vulnerable. When the throne fell vacant in 1580, Philip II of Spain swept in to claim it. He had a birthright to the crown, but he also had enough power to see off his rivals. Following his confirmation as king of Portugal in 1581, he created a personal union of his new realm's empire with the Spanish imperial power. His latest kingdom retained autonomy over many aspects of its administration and it also benefitted from being able to access Spanish trade routes. But it also became a target for Spain's enemies. In the same year, part of Philip's Dutch lands finally won the independence they had long been seeking and merchants began to set their sights on the imperial prizes that had brought so much wealth to the continent over the previous two centuries.

> "The main impetus for this expansion was a desire to tap into lucrative businesses"

By the time the union with Spain ended in 1640, Portugal's position had weakened. The Dutch push for trade routes in Asia and India had erupted into war in 1602, while the English were also encroaching on imperial holdings. However, at the end of the 17th century, the discovery of gold in Brazil brought new wealth to the empire, with the crown in Lisbon claiming 20 per cent of everything found. But as Brazil boomed, its inhabitants' minds turned to independence. And a series of disasters in Lisbon, including the 1755 earthquake and tsunami, which claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, weakened its centralised power. The rise of Napoleon in the early 1800s damaged Portugal further and by the middle of the 19th century, Brazil had declared independence, and as a result, Lisbon focused its imperial efforts on Africa.

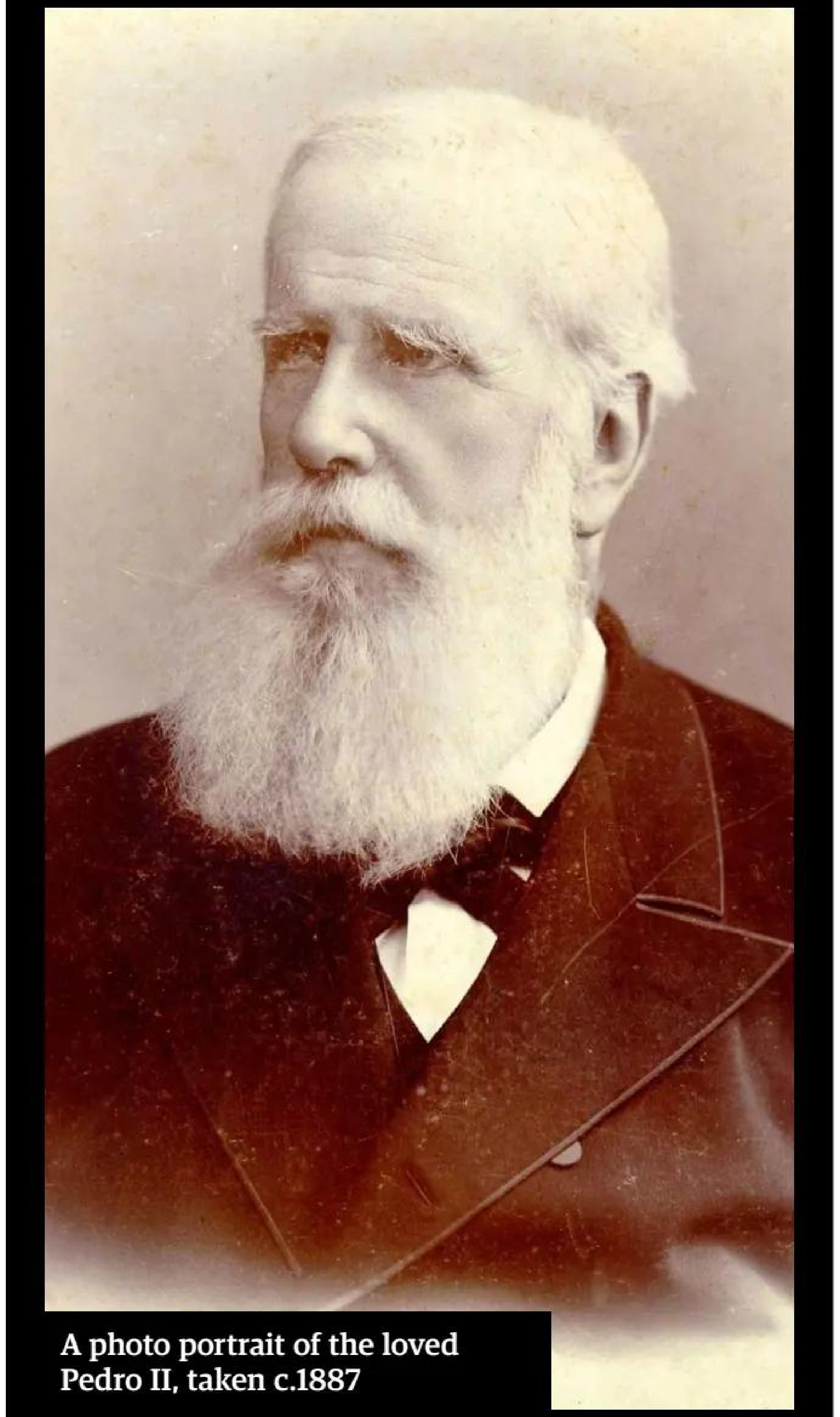
In an attempt to re-establish its pre-eminence on the world stage, Portugal began to work towards forming larger colonies in Africa. Its Pink Map of the 1880s sought to link its holdings and create a swathe of empire across the centre of the continent. But the central government was in no position to press on in the face of opposition. The British Ultimatum of 1890 effectively ended colonial expansion and in the 20th century, independence movements unravelled what little remained of Portugal's imperial power.

Although the regime of António de Oliveira Salazar attempted to retain Portugal's colonies, renaming them overseas provinces, it was ultimately powerless to stop them the march to independence. Goa, the jewel in the emperor's crown, was taken by India in the 1960s, with Benin also breaking free. The remaining African holdings were decolonised as Salazar's Estado Novo regime wobbled and fell. The last overseas possession, Macau, was returned to China in 1999, bringing to an end an empire acknowledged as one of the first global powers.


By the 18th century, the Dutch were used to sailing their ships into Portuguese waters and ports as the imperial power faced challenges from its European neighbours

THE CROWN THAT CALLED TIME ON ITSELF

The Brazilian monarchy was popular and stable but would survive less than a century


A photo portrait of the loved Pedro II, taken c.1887

Pedro II, emperor of Brazil, had already decided his throne would end with him when it was unexpectedly overthrown. On 15 November 1889, he was unseated by a military coup, an inglorious end to an empire had enjoyed new glory days under Pedro's care.

His success came against the odds. The empire of Brazil had sprung up unexpectedly, winning independence from Portugal in a dynastic game of thrones. King John VI of Portugal had set up court in Rio de Janeiro in 1808 where he tried to keep control of his country and his empire as Napoleon advanced through Europe. When he finally returned to Lisbon, he left his son as regent but the prince quickly rebelled and declared Brazilian independence while he became King Pedro I. Further dynastic difficulties led to his own abdication and the succession of his five year old son as Pedro II of Brazil. But as soon as he came of age, this last emperor began to make his dominions great again.

Brazil's economy grew, the arts scene flourished and the emperor steered his country to victory in a string of international disputes. He also oversaw the abolition of slavery (in 1888) while his country became increasingly attractive to disgruntled Europeans who arrived there in waves, looking for a better life.

However, forward thinking Pedro remained traditional in one aspect and decided his sole heir, daughter Isabel, wouldn't inherit his throne. When the military rose up and drove him into exile, Pedro put up little resistance. Within weeks, Brazil, once the heart of the Portuguese empire, had become a republic.

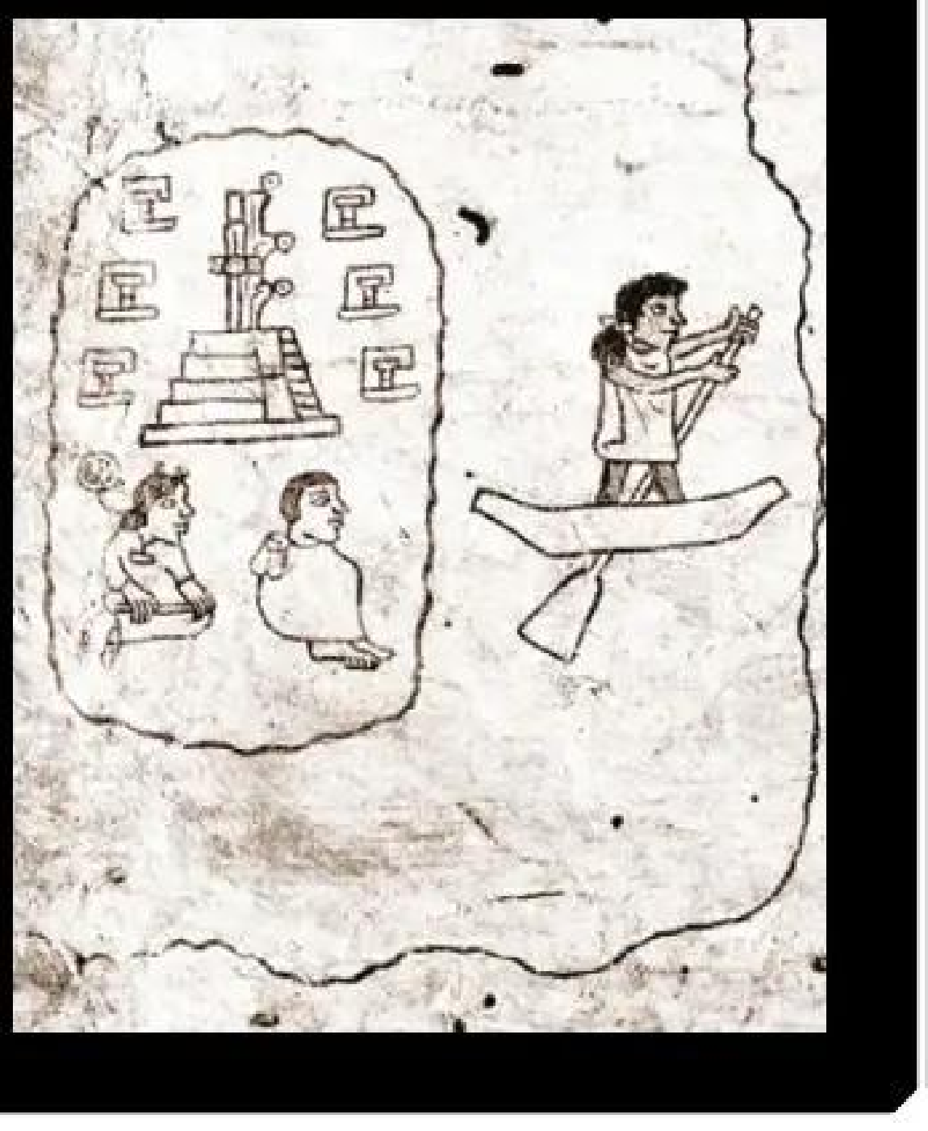
© Getty Images

THE AZTEC EMPIRE

Discover the history of an extraordinary empire in Central America and how it fell at the hands of the Spanish conquistadors

NUAHTL SPEAKERS SETTLE IN MEXICO

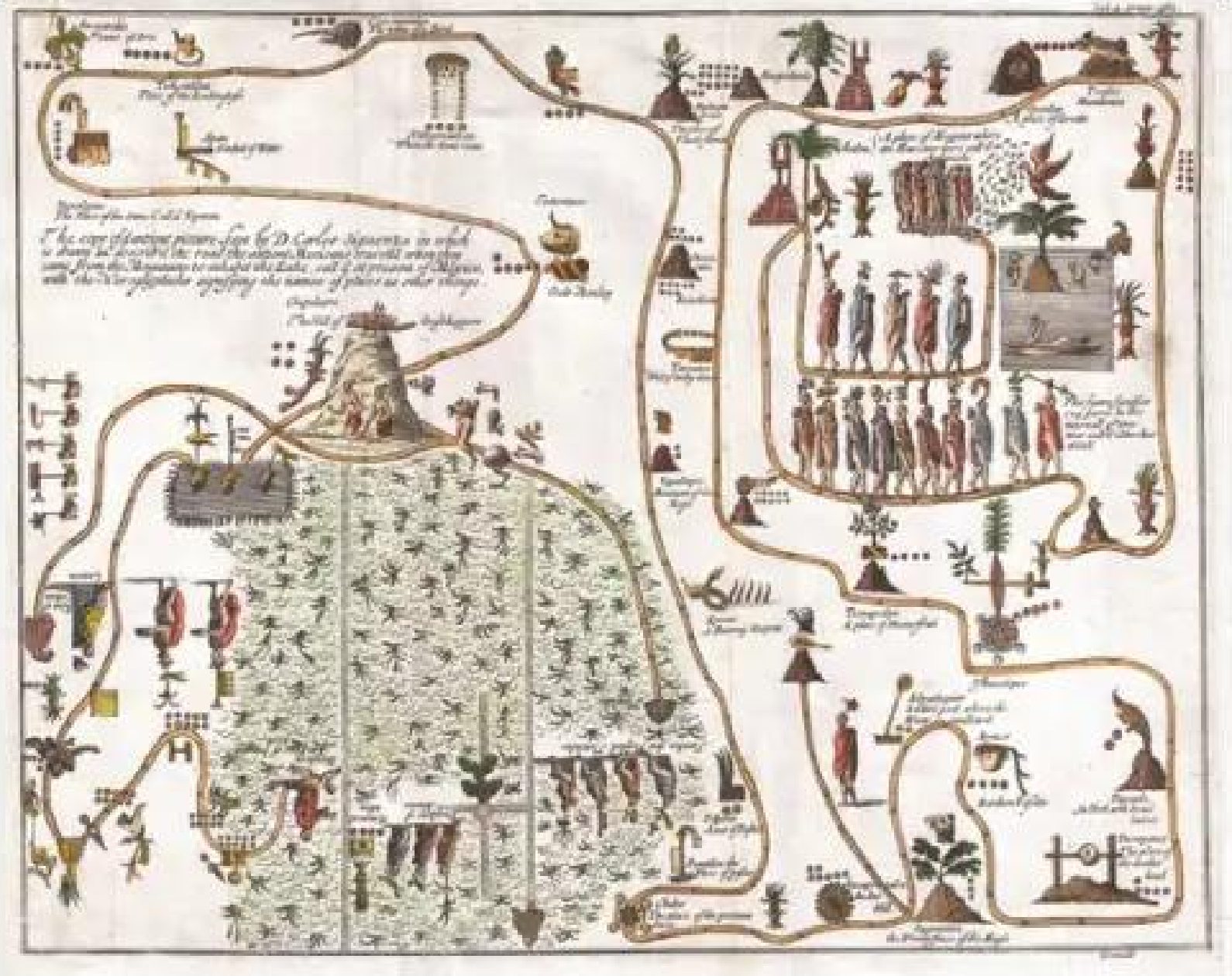
The Mexica tribe leave its homeland of Aztlan for a new place to settle, guided by its god Huitzilopochtli. If Aztlan is a real place, it's thought to be in today's California.



C.1110

MEXICA TRIBE SETTLE IN CHAPULTEPEC

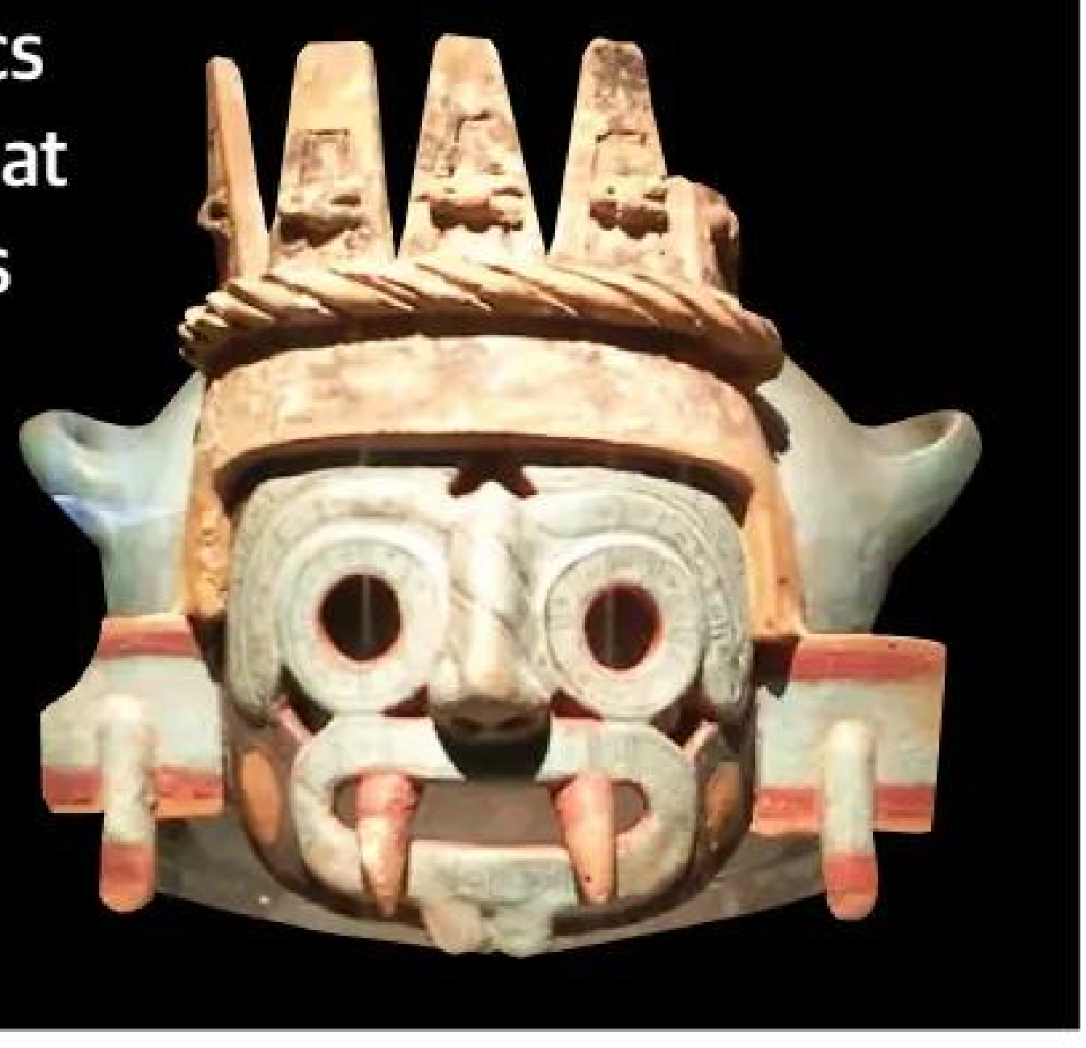
Chapultepec, on the western shore of Lake Texcoco, is taken by the Tepanec tribe, a similar people to the Aztecs. The Mexica try to settle, but the Tepanecs force them to move on.



C.1248

TENOCHTITLÁN HIT BY FLOODS

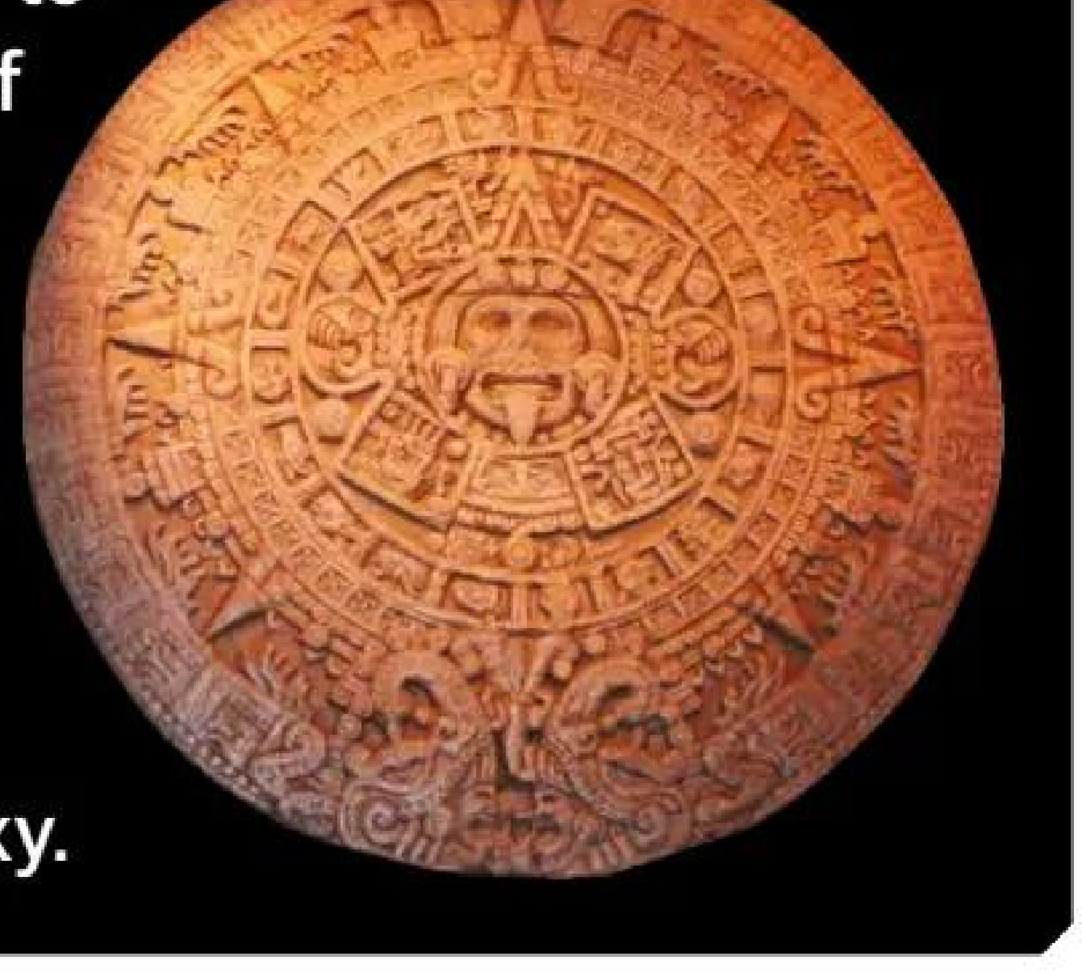
Severe flooding damages the watery city, which is built on stilt-like foundations and utilises canals and causeways. The Aztecs believe that the floods are sent by an angered Tlaloc, god of rain.



1452

NEW FIRE CEREMONY

This is celebrated in November every 52 years at the end of the Aztec celestial calendar. The ceremony is thought to stave off the end of the world and keep the Sun in the sky.



1455

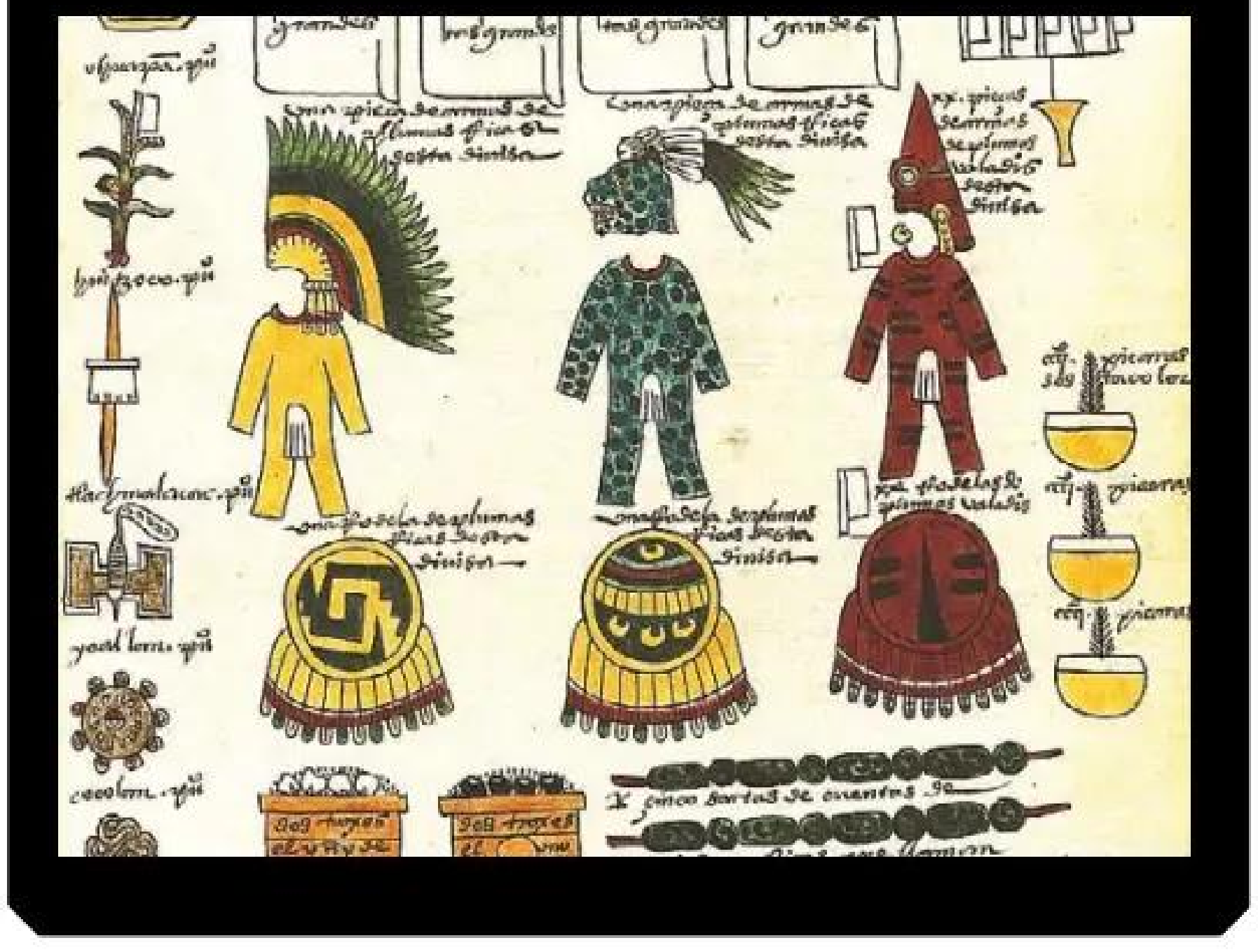
COYOLXUAHQUI STONE CARVED

The imposing circular likeness of the decapitated and dismembered goddess Coyolxuahqui, sister of god Huitzilopochtli, is created and placed at the bottom of the steps at Templo Mayor.

1473

EMPIRE AT ITS PEAK

The final rebuild of the colossal Templo Mayor is complete, great speaker Ahuitzotl is ruling the Aztec Empire at its peak and huge volumes of tributes are collected.



1497

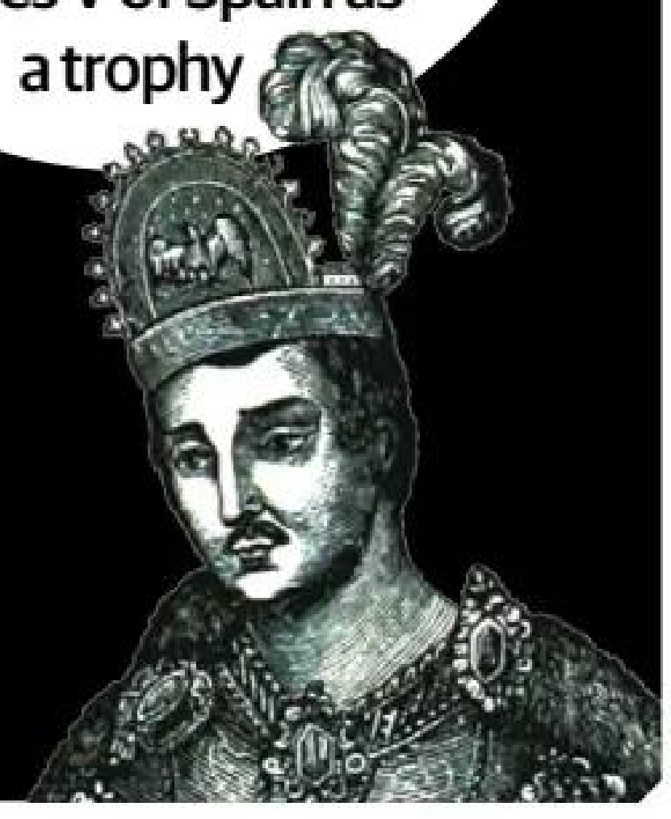
MONTECZHUMA II COMES TO POWER

He is the **9TH** leader of the Aztec Empire

He ruled from Tenochtitlán for **18 YEARS**

Monteczhuma II governed an empire with a population of **6 MILLION**

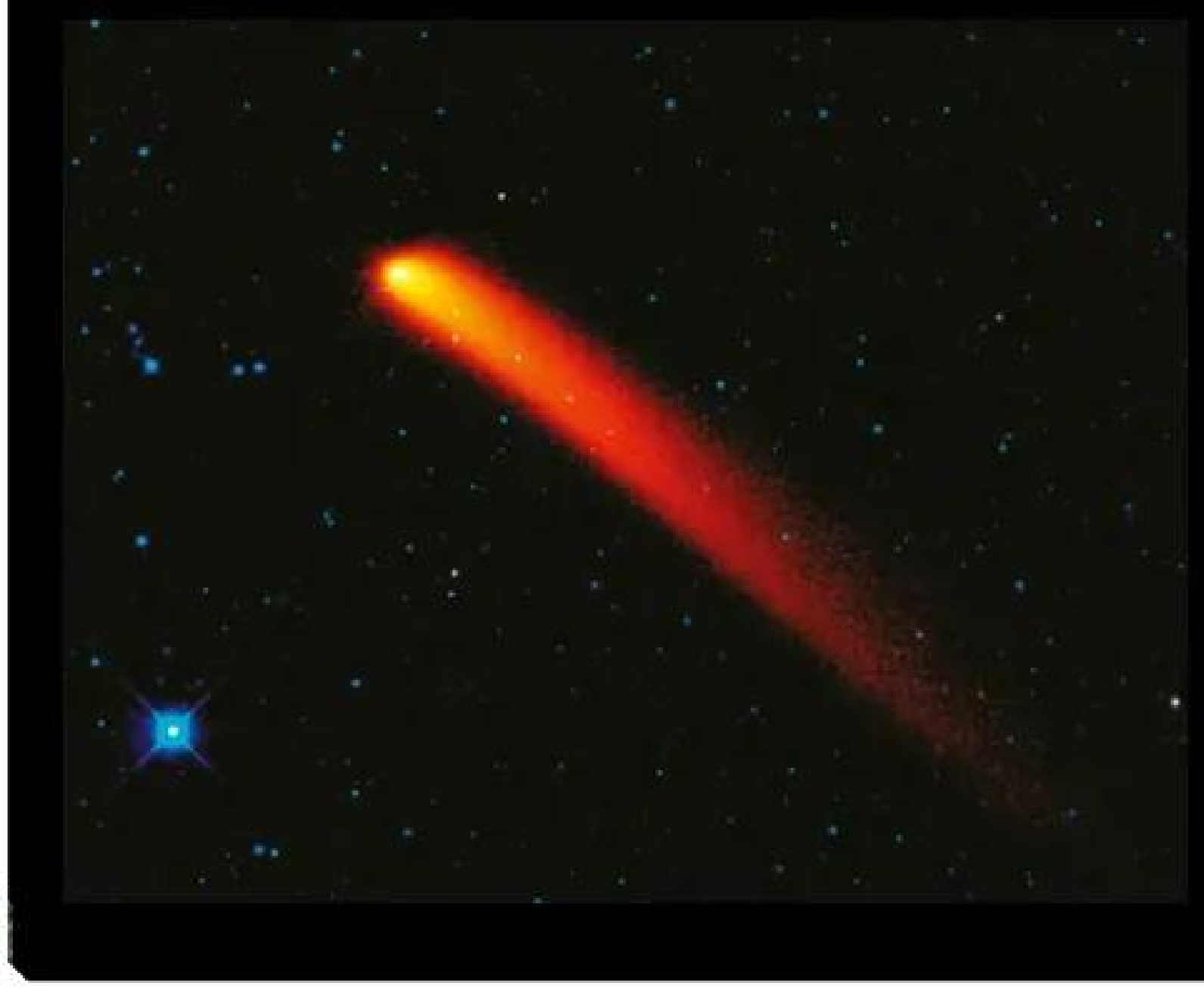
Aztec rulers wore majestic headdresses and Monteczhuma's was said to have over 400 amazing feathers. After his death, conquistador Cortés sent the headdress to Charles V of Spain as a trophy



1502

THE COMET

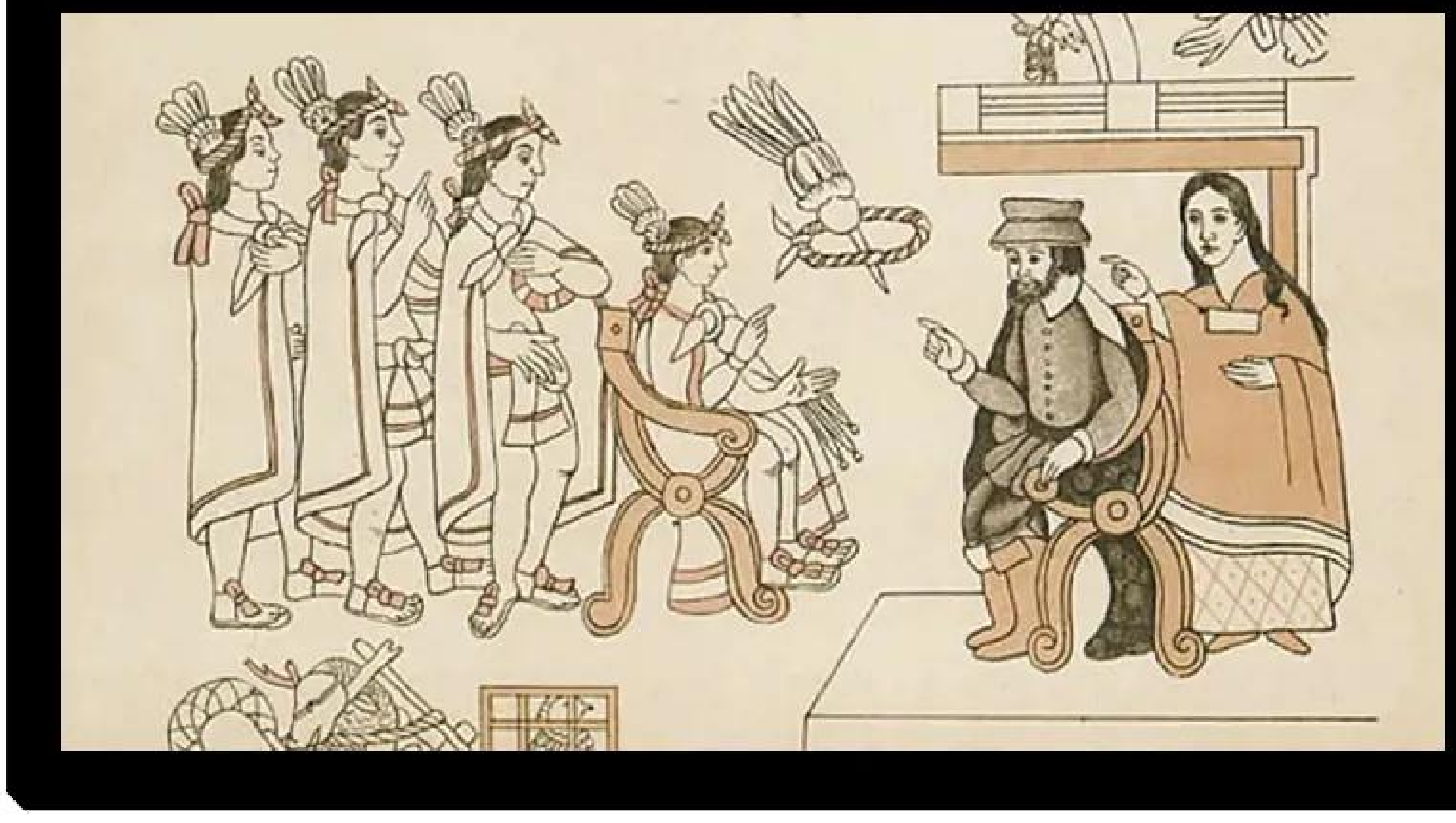
The Aztecs both worshipped and observed the heavens. Unexplained events such as the appearance of a fiery comet were interpreted as signs of impending doom.



1517

ARRIVAL OF HERNÁN CORTÉS

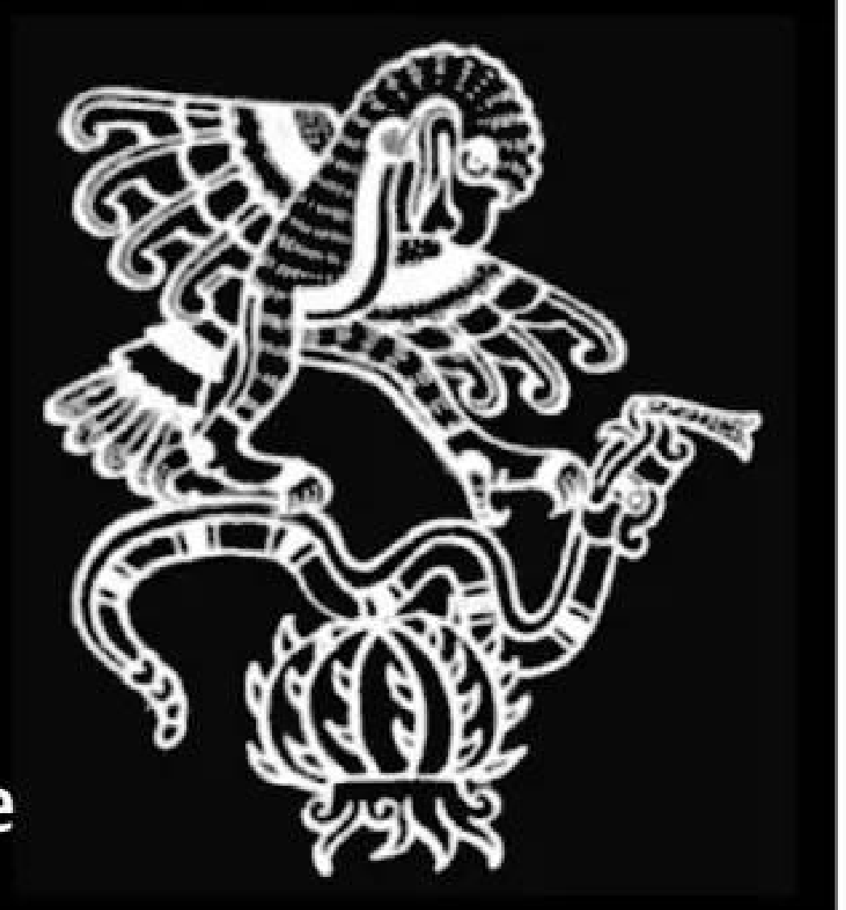
Spanish conquistador Cortés lands in Mexico and hears of the Aztec civilisation and their treasure. He takes his men to Tenochtitlán and Monteczhuma chooses to greet him as a guest of honour.



1519

BEGINNING OF TENOCHTITLÁN

On a marshy island in Lake Texcoco, Aztec priests see an eagle devouring a serpent, while perched on a cactus. They take it as sign from the gods that they should settle here.

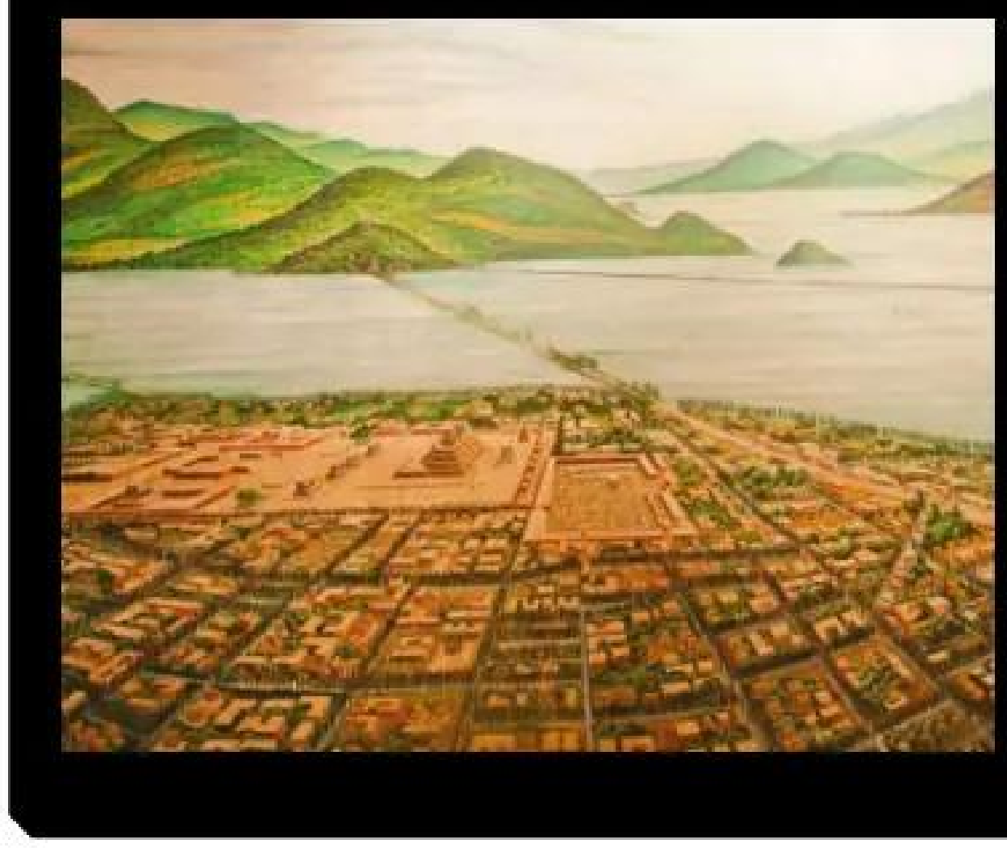


1325

EXPANSION OF TENOCHTITLÁN

3 causeways were built to join Tenochtitlán to the mainland.

2 aqueducts were constructed to supply the city with fresh water

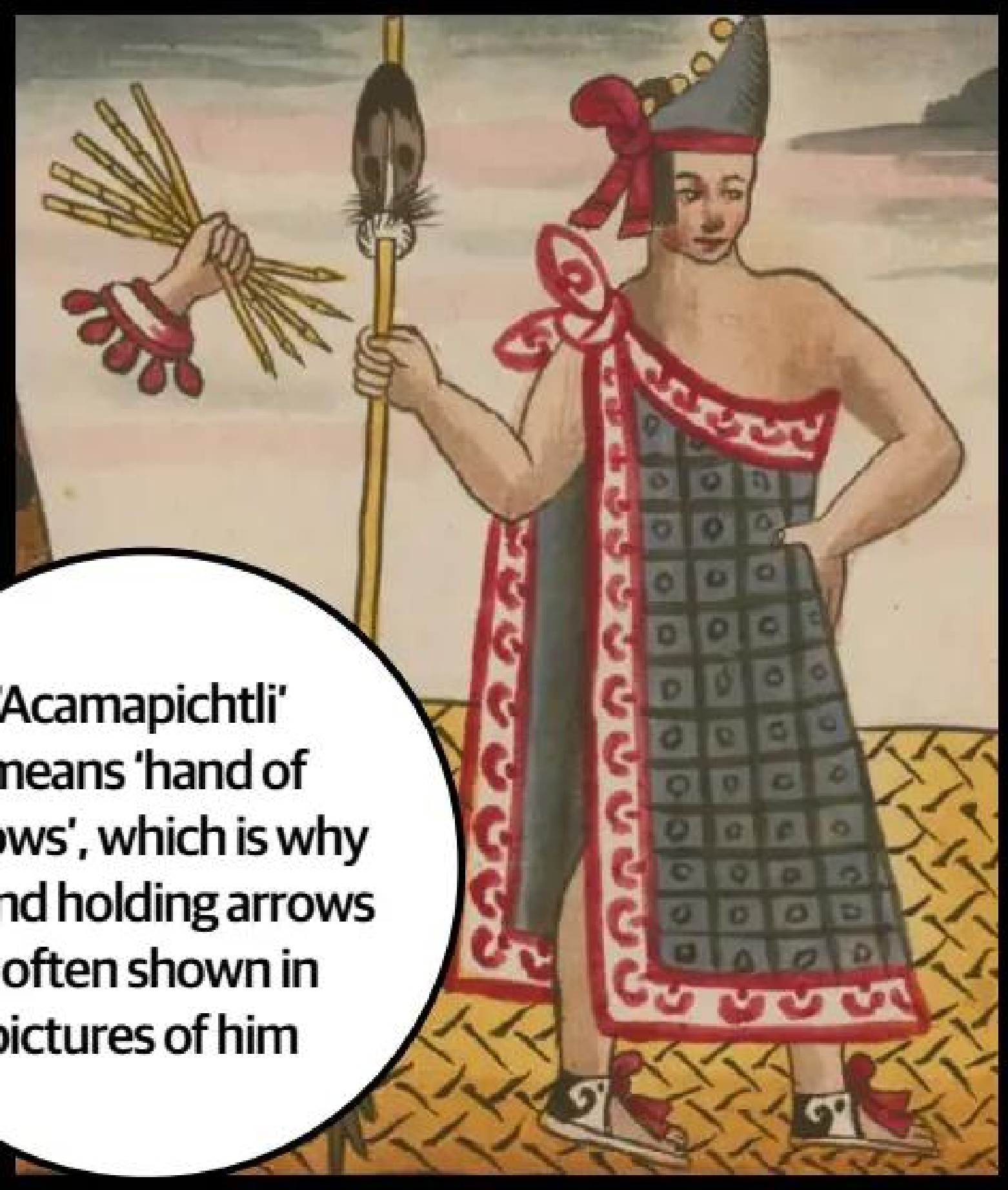


The ever-growing city is divided up into **4** zones with **20** districts.

1350

FIRST AZTEC SPEAKER

Acamapitchli becomes Tenochtitlán's first 'tlatoani' or 'Great Speaker', the first dominant Aztec ruler. He makes important political ties to strengthen the Aztec capital.

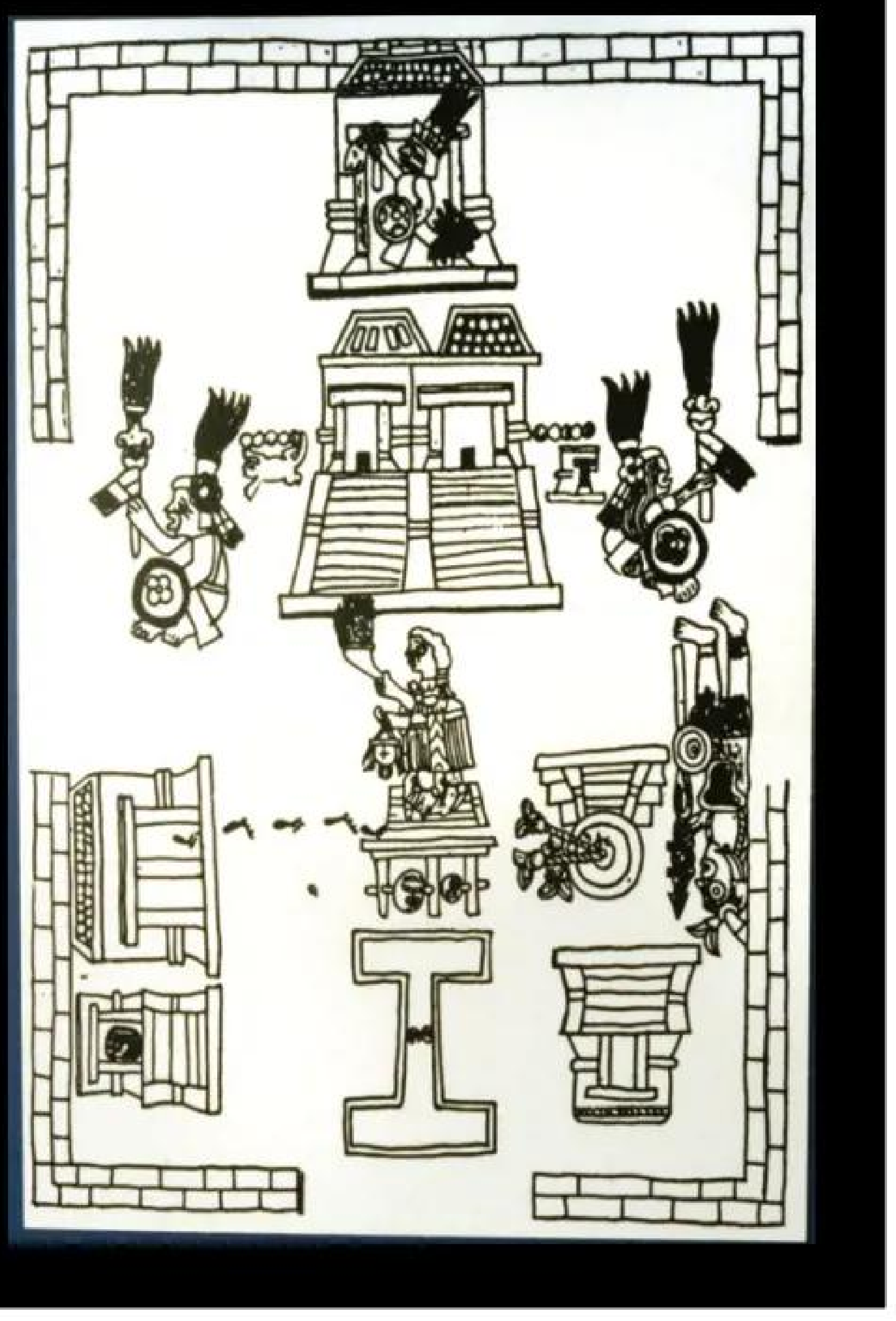


'Acamapichtli' means 'hand of arrows', which is why a hand holding arrows is often shown in pictures of him

1375-95

FIRST TEMPLE STARTED

A rudimentary platform is erected (marked with a hieroglyph) where the priests saw the eagle with the snake. It holds a shrine to the Aztec god Huitzilopochtli and will evolve into the Templo Mayor.



1390

THE TEPANEC WAR

The Mexica people revolt against the dominant power of Tepanec city-state Azcapotzalo in dispute of paying high tributes. The war lasts for three years.

The extortionate tributes demanded by Azcapotzalo were set as a punishment for siding with the wrong heir to the Tepanec throne

1417-27

AZTEC TRIPLE ALLIANCE FORMED

A united alliance of **3** city-states (Tenochtitlán, Tlacopan and Texcoco) forms to fight against the Tepanecs of Azcapotzalo and win the war.

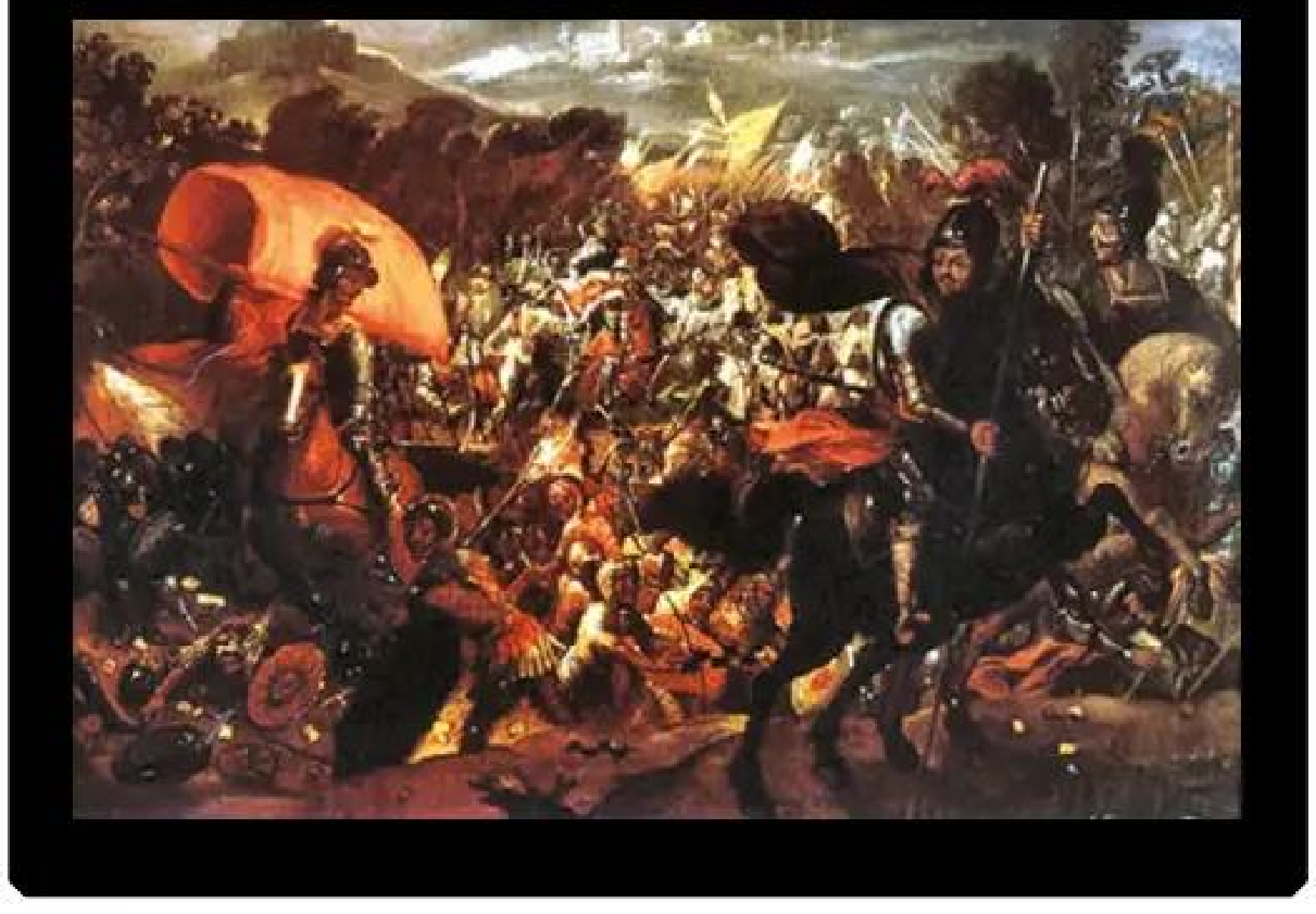
This alliance forms the basis of the Aztec Empire, with Tenochtitlán as the dominant ruler taking 2/5 of the booty.

Alliance leads to the flower wars, where battles were arranged specifically to allow for the capture of **1,000s** of prisoners for sacrifice.

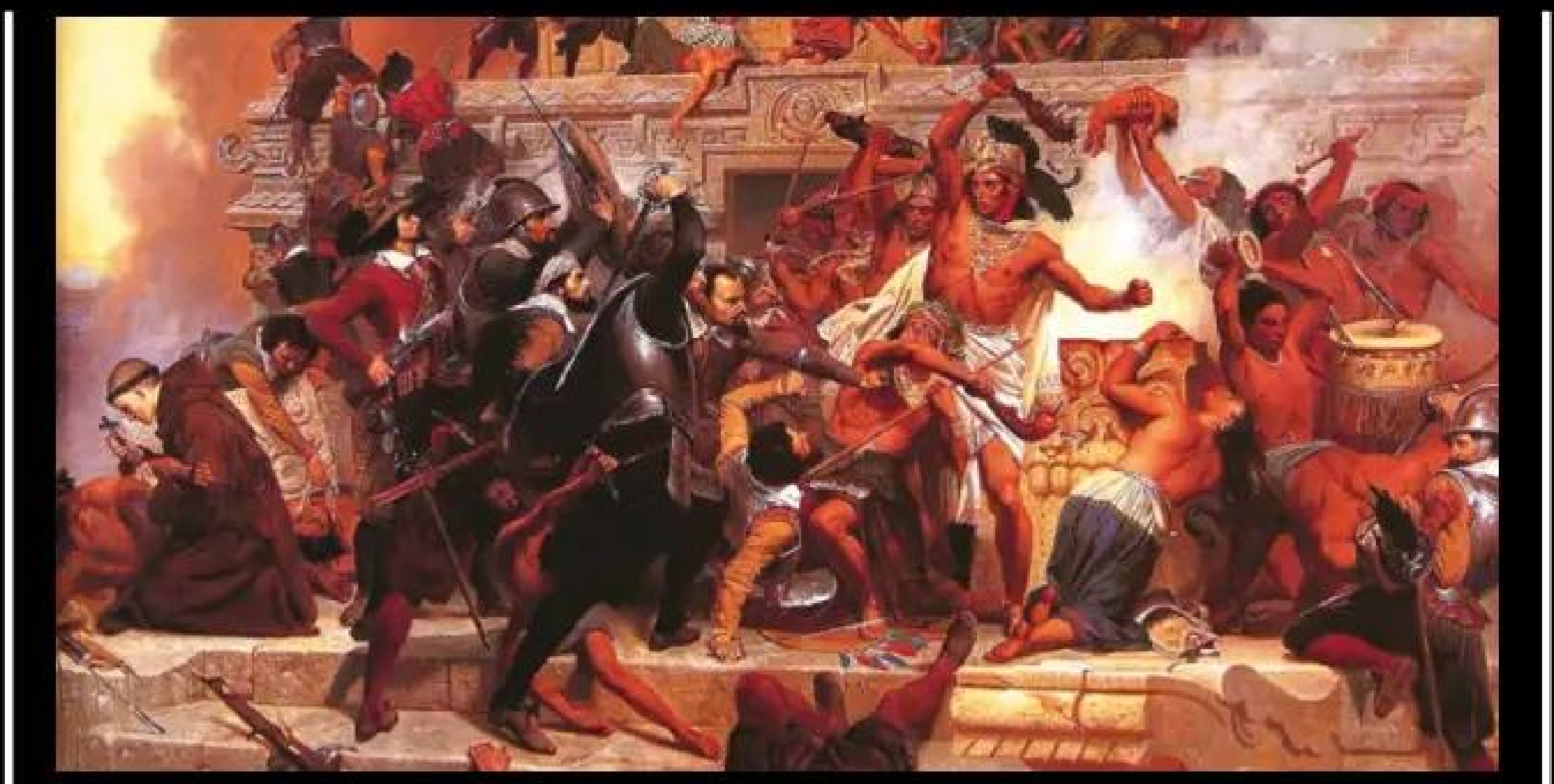
1428

THE SAD NIGHT

Monteczhuma is captured and killed by the Spanish. His brother tales over and drives the conquistadores from Tenochtitlán, but an outbreak of smallpox, brought with the Spanish, ravages the city.



1520



THE SIEGE OF TENOCHTITLÁN

Cortés sides with enemies of the empire and besieges Tenochtitlán, cutting off food and water supplies by land and across Lake Texcoco. The siege only lasts a few months.

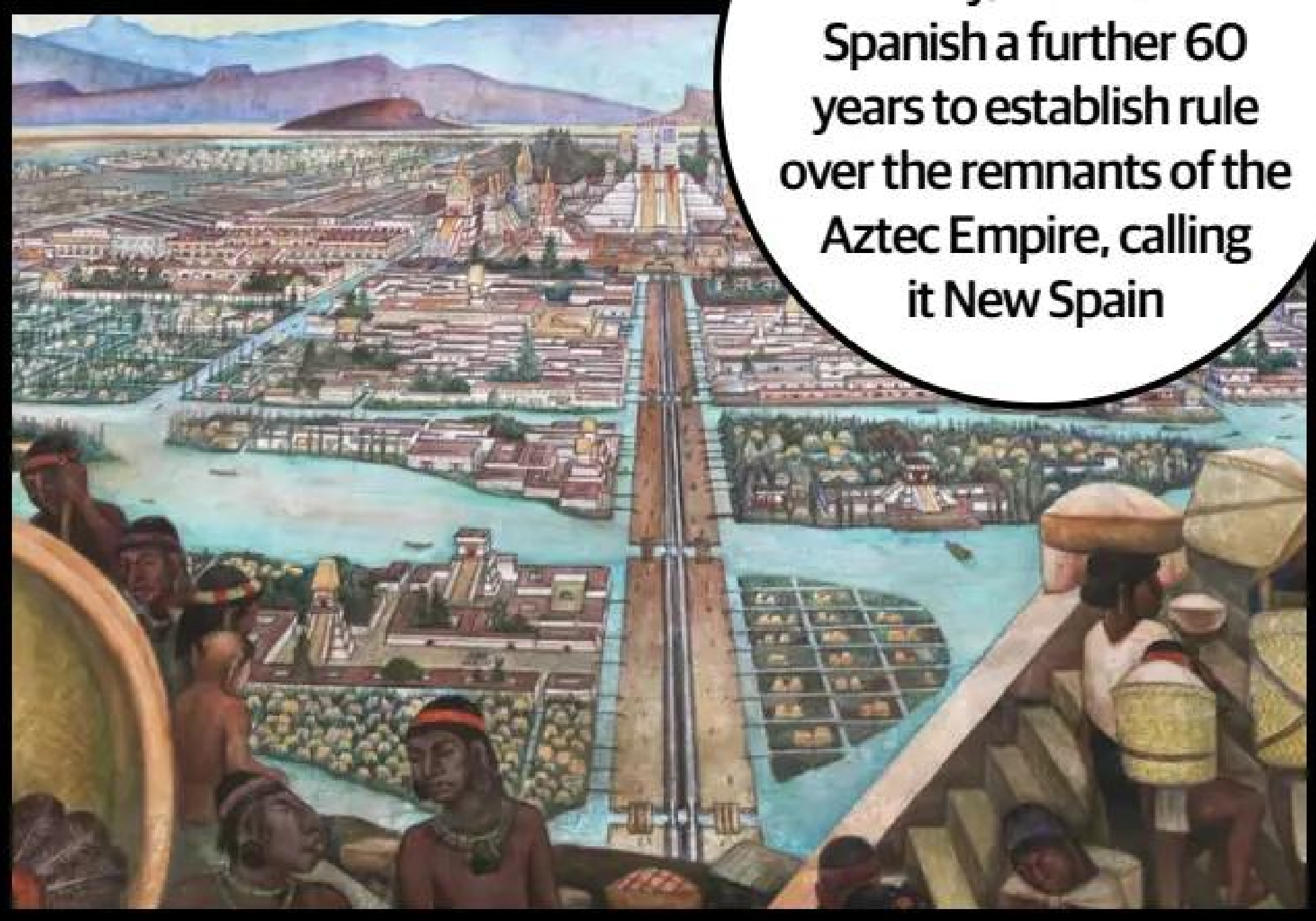
1521

FALL OF TENOCHTITLÁN TO SPANISH

When Tenochtitlán falls, there are **200,000** residents

The colossal city covers an area of **12km²**

A 16km dyke seals off part of the lake so the city is in a man-made lagoon



Despite conquering the city, it takes the Spanish a further 60 years to establish rule over the remnants of the Aztec Empire, calling it New Spain

13 AUGUST 1521

Machu Picchu stands 2,430 metres above sea level and remains the most famous of all the Inca ruins

THE INCA EMPIRE

Relying on tax, roads and conquest, the Incas ruled supreme in western South America for almost a century prior to the arrival of foreign invaders

Written by Charlie Ginger

When the first band of hunters crossed the Bering Strait 15,000 years ago, they were not just venturing into unknown territory: they were taking the first steps towards the establishment of an empire that would one day dominate huge swathes of South America.

As with any form of evolution, the development of the mighty Inca Empire was gradual. While hunter-gatherer communities began to settle in the Cuzco Valley (south Peru) around 4500 BCE, the city of Cuzco would only begin to blossom into a regional powerhouse in 1000 CE. Yet, while the journey from wandering the wilds of South America to forming a city was indeed a lengthy one, it culminated in an explosion of progress from 1438 onwards that saw the Inca civilisation expand to cover 3,400 miles of land and rule 10 million subjects. Impressively, this vast empire was not secured by bloodshed alone.

Imperial ambitions can only be achieved through conquest, but the Incas, of whom there were only around 40,000, preferred to increase their sphere of influence via more peaceful means. This often entailed the promise of reward and the maintenance of the status quo for those rival leaders who would accept the Sun god Inti (whom the Incas believed liberated them from within the Earth after Viracocha, the supreme Inca god, created humanity and then promptly buried it) as their deity and provide tributes. Many neighbouring peoples willingly accepted and therefore found themselves integrated into the empire. However, expansion was not always bloodless.

In 1438, the Chanca people launched a pre-emptive strike against a fledgling Inca realm in a bid to secure control of local resources. Initially it seemed like an enterprise destined for success, for the incumbent Inca ruler, Viracocha Inca, seemed utterly unable to counter the threat to his capital, instead opting to flee. Thankfully for the people of Cuzco, a young prince by the name of Pachacuti fought back - according to legend, the gods turned stones into soldiers, who then helped Pachacuti crush the Chanca, who paid dearly for their aggression as the Incas massacred their forces and subjugated their people.

Buoyed by his stunning victory, the newly crowned Sapa Inca (king) Pachacuti embarked on a campaign of expansion, tasking his people with rebuilding large parts of Cuzco and carving out settlements such as Machu Picchu (founded in 1450). An astute administrator, he also granted all speakers of the Inca tongue, Quechua, noble status before charging them with running his sprawling empire. The man hailed as 'The Reverser of the World' knew how to guarantee loyalty.

While 1471 was a year of great triumph for the Incas, it was also one of loss, for Pachacuti's life and reign would come to an end. Such a seismic changing of the guard has often sparked civil war throughout history, but the Incas' luck held with the emergence of Pachacuti's son Tupac Inca Yupanqui as their second ruler. A man of even greater ambition, Tupac set his sights on the Chimu civilisation.

As the largest rival to the Incas, the Chimu posed the gravest threat to Tupac's dreams of further expansion. As a result, they were dealt

Meaning 'hand-wood', the macuahuitl was said to be sharp enough to decapitate both men and horses

with ruthlessly. Having captured their leader, Minchancaman, Pachacuti deftly transferred the Chimu's greatest artists to Cuzco, where their ability to create goods that could be sold to fund an uprising would instead contribute to the Inca Empire's growth. In one fell swoop Tupac had wiped the last remaining enemy superpower off the map and brought 1,000 kilometres of coastline under his control.

Success on this scale of course required large armies, some of which comprised 100,000 men, the majority of whom were not Incas. These hordes of multilingual warriors were split into forces of 10,000 under the leadership of a hunu karaka, while a few thousand true Incas, clad in imposing chequered tunics, would band together to form the king's bodyguard.

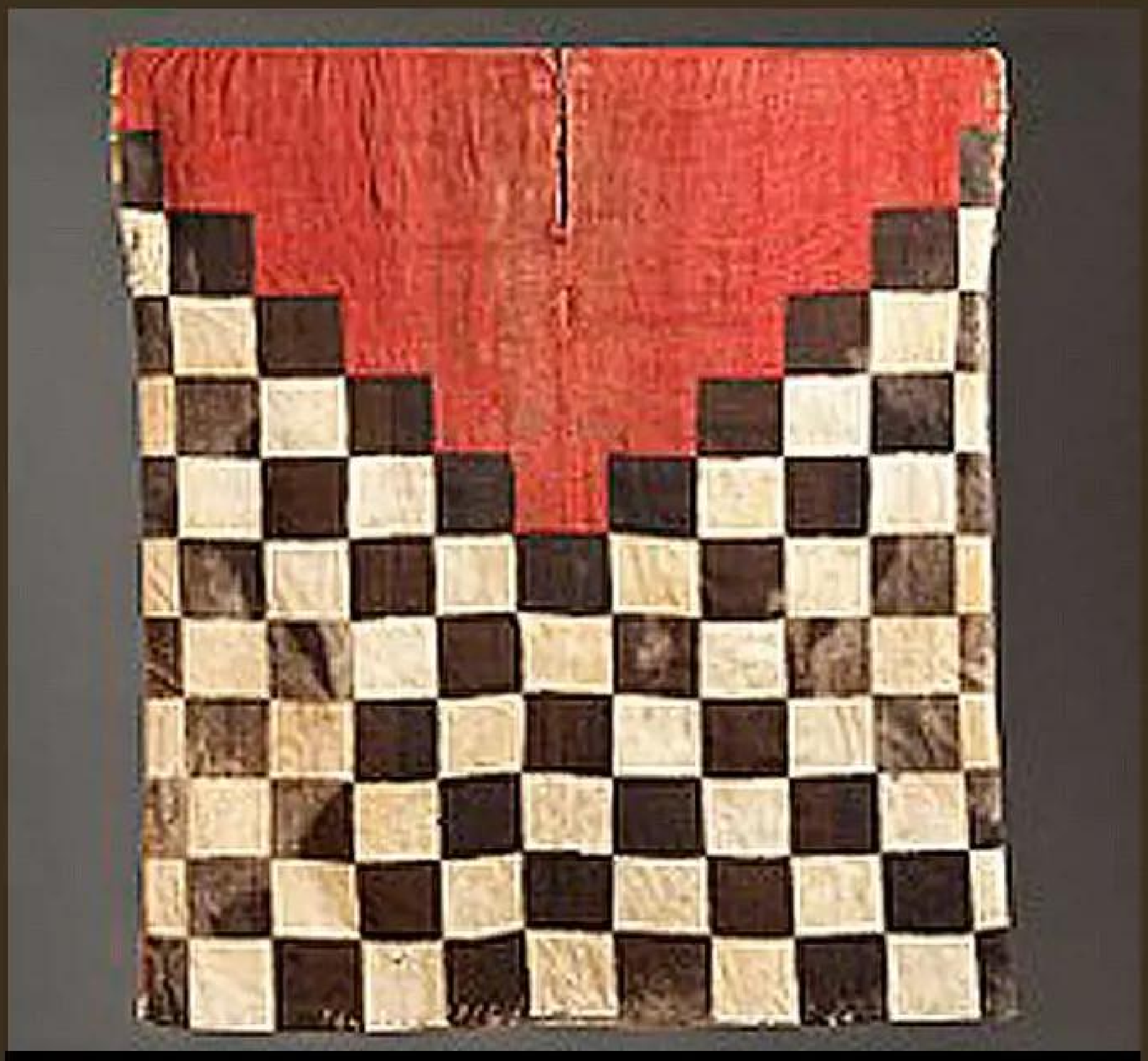
Aged between 25 and 50, the king's armies were equipped with a range of weapons, including maces, slings, bows and arrows, javelins and the much-favoured palm-wood club, similar in appearance to a flat sword with circular ridges etched down either side of the 'blade'. A military arm of this strength enabled the Incas to eradicate a number of cities and any rival populations foolhardy enough to resist them, such as the unfortunate Cayambe, a people of 30,000 that once inhabited the highlands of Ecuador. However, an army alone does not secure an empire, and a row of advanced fortresses were erected to secure the Incas' borders and their network of narrow trading routes.

Their position as the region's dominant force cemented, the Incas could continue to enforce their system of taxation. The families under Inca rule were divided into communal settlements known as an 'ayllu', with each one required to provide two forms of taxation, taxes enforced by inspectors called tokoyrikoqs, or 'he who sees all'. These tax collectors ensured the crops from the ayllu fields were split into thirds: one for the government and the other two shared equally between the priests and the people.

The second method of taxation, referred to as 'mit'a', entailed exacting a physical toll from the empire's menfolk. Each man aged between 16 and 60 was required to toil for the government for part of the year, work that often entailed constructing roads and forts or toiling in gold mines. It was thanks to this efficient system that the Incas were able to accrue the wealth and carve the roads (incredibly, they never discovered the wheel) needed to expand at such a meteoric rate, one that saw the empire double during the tenure of Tupac Inca Yupanqui. Yet while the golden age of Inca dominance burned bright, it would also burn briefly.

In 1493, Tupac was succeeded by Huayna Capac as Sapa Inca, and while he would oversee yet another spell of imperial growth and an enormous construction programme, he would also rule long enough to see Machu Picchu abandoned in 1510 as the Spanish invasion of South America began. With no ability to resist the diseases or the arms that the conquistadors of Francisco Pizarro brought with them, the Incas suffered huge fatalities. Yet worse was still to come.

Prior to his sudden death in 1526, Huayna Capac had prevaricated over who should succeed him, inevitably resulting in a power struggle the moment he breathed his last. The catastrophic civil war that would tear the empire asunder at the very moment it needed to unite would be fought between Huayna Capac's sons, Huascar Inca, and his half-brother, Atahualpa, each one ruler of half of the empire.



A horde of Inca soldiers wearing this standard military tunic must have made for a colourful and formidable sight

LONG LIVE THE EMPIRE

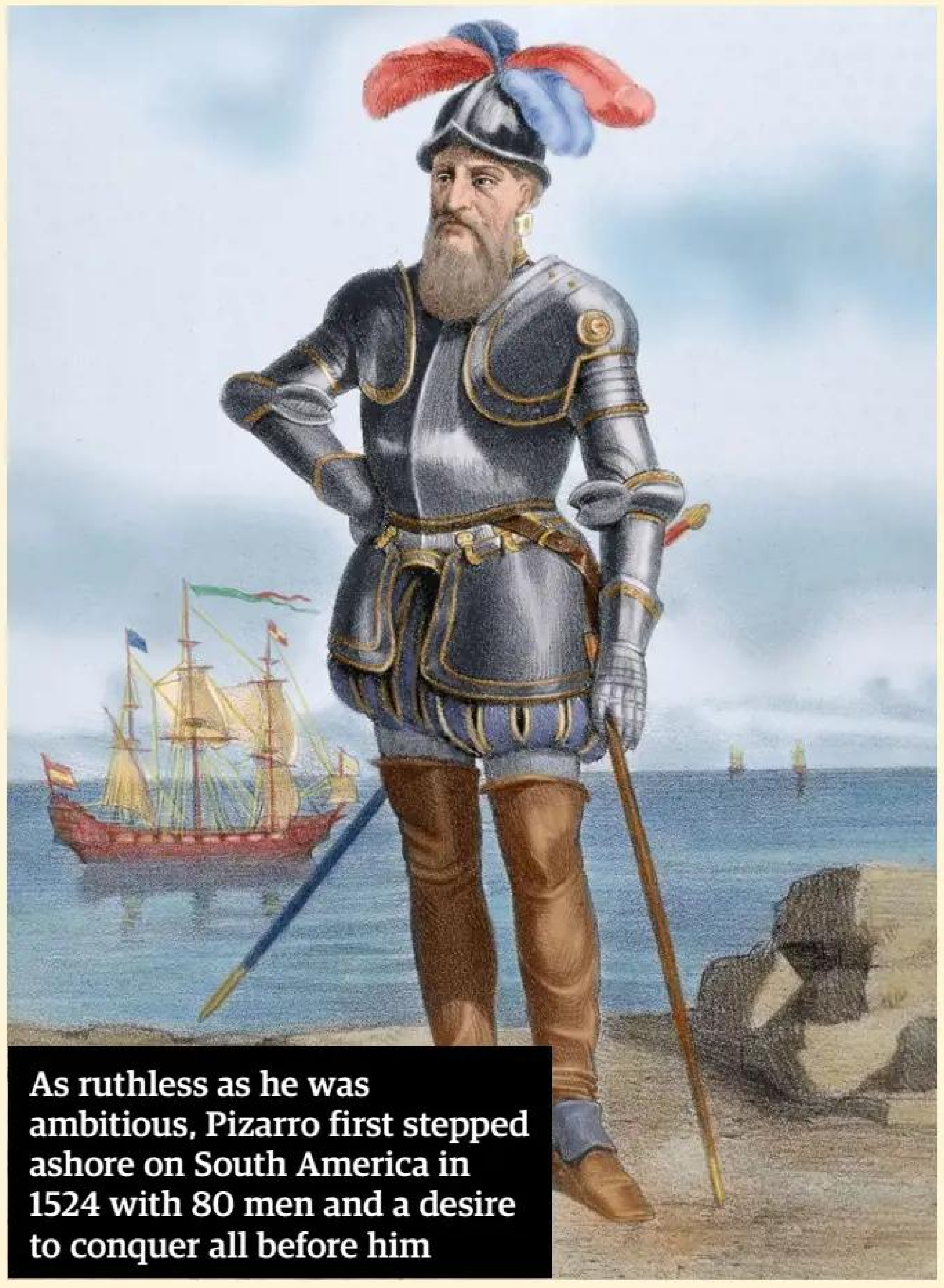
As the Spanish tightened their stranglehold on Cuzco, one man vowed to fight on

In the wake of the violent murder of Atahualpa, Francisco Pizarro installed Tupac Huallpa as puppet ruler of the Incas, a man who was then soon replaced by Huascar's younger brother Manco. It would prove an unwise move on the behalf of the Spanish, as Manco was not one to stomach their maltreatment.

Having escaped from Pizarro's grip, Manco quickly set about raising an army of some 200,000 men and laying siege to Cuzco (beginning in 1536) in a bid to reclaim the city and reform the Inca Empire. While his attempt to retake Cuzco ended in his retreat after ten months of surrounding the Spanish garrisons within it, Manco did manage to extricate his forces intact and make for the fortress of Ollantaytambo in southern Peru, where he was then able to force back a series of Spanish assaults.

Despite Cuzco being the grander prize, Manco had not concentrated all of his forces upon it; Lima, a city established by Pizarro, had also found itself victim to a siege, one that four relief efforts failed to lift.

Further undermining their efforts to end the rebellion, the Spanish plunged into a civil war of their own, thereby enabling Manco to withdraw further into the forbidding jungles of South America and found the independent Neo-Inca State, which would last until its fall to the Spanish in 1572.



As ruthless as he was ambitious, Pizarro first stepped ashore on South America in 1524 with 80 men and a desire to conquer all before him

Concerned by his sibling's control of the empire's armies, Huascar struck out for Quito in a bid to seize the city. While he didn't manage to achieve this aim, he did capture Atahualpa. Just as victory seemed certain for Huascar, Atahualpa escaped and mustered his forces.

A man of cunning, Atahualpa divided his armies, sending one led by his generals Chalcuchima and Quisquis to confront his brother, while leaving another to watch over Quito under the leadership of the impressive Ruminahui. A series of bloody engagements followed, clashes that claimed the lives of over 100,000 of Huascar's men (including his brother and general Atoc, who was tortured before having his skull turned into a golden goblet for Atahualpa's use) and culminated in his defeat in 1532 at the Battle of Quipaipan near the walls of Cuzco and subsequent imprisonment.

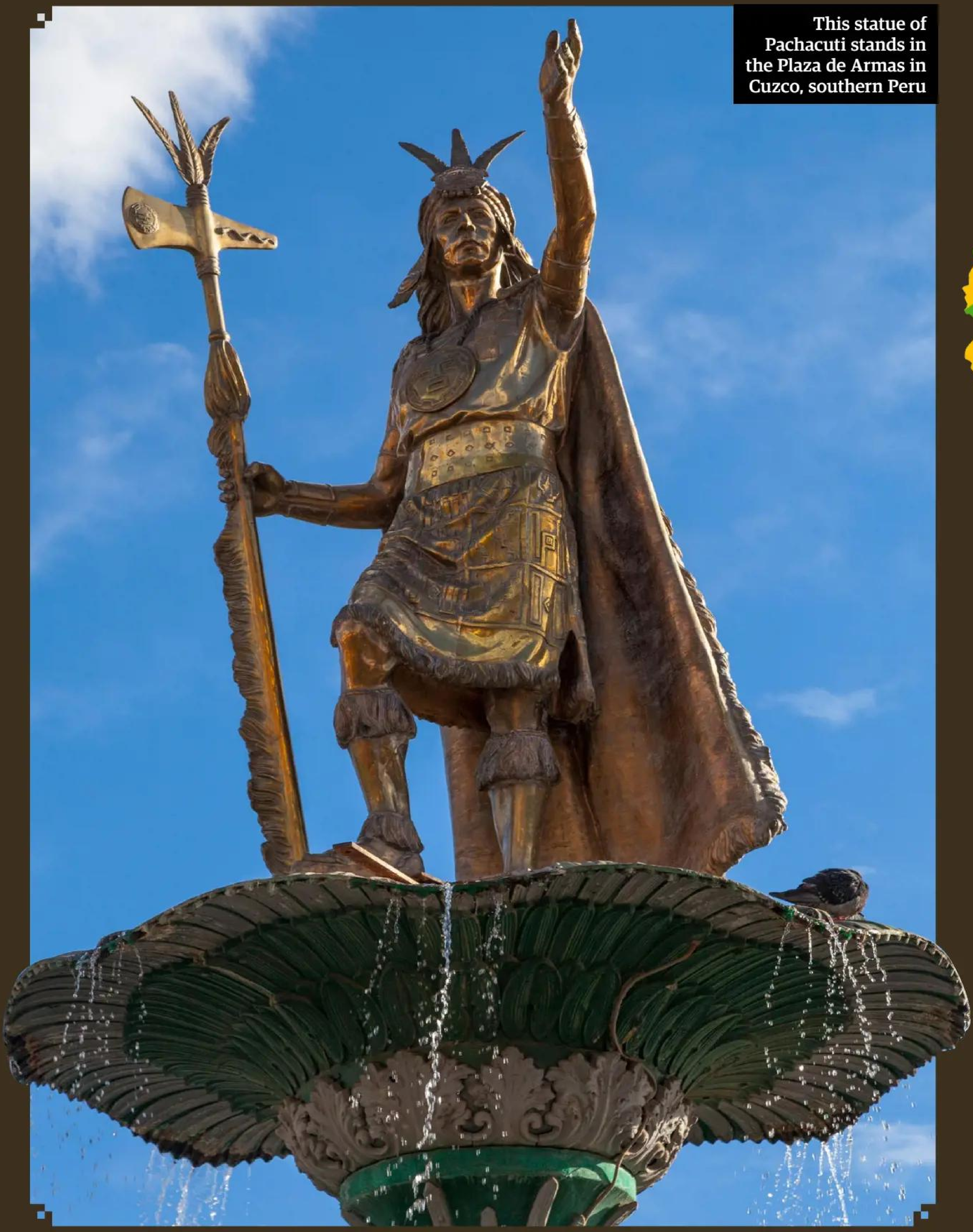
No doubt relieved to have won 'The War of the Two Brothers', Atahualpa's joy would be short-lived, for a threat far graver than any posed by his brother was approaching: the Spanish.

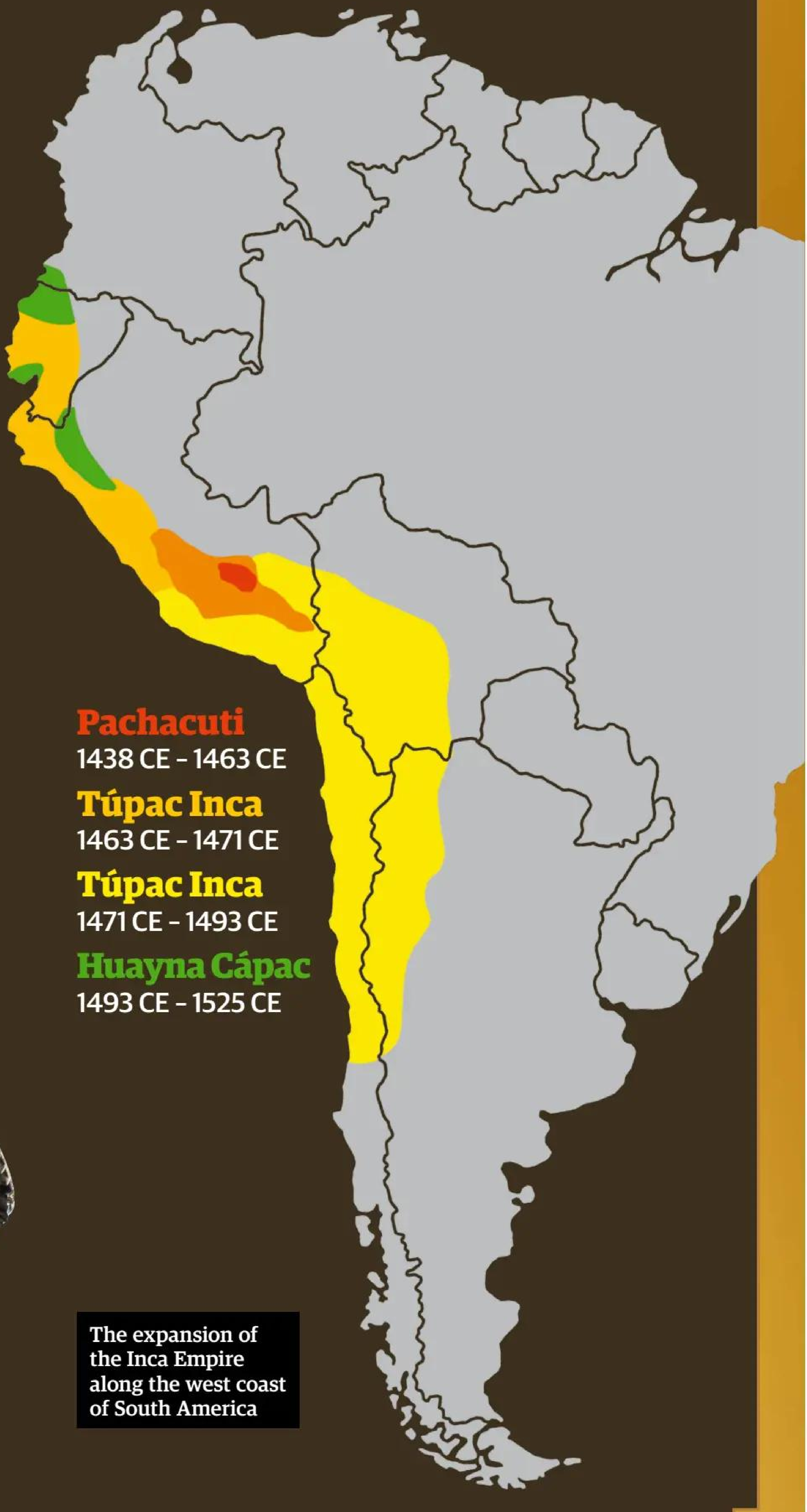
Having crushed the Aztec Empire in 1521, the Spanish had been moving south ever since in their insatiable search for plunder. Armed with weapons and sailing aboard vessels totally alien to the natives, nothing could stand in their way. In November 1532, the ruthless Pizarro reached the city of Cajamarca (situated in the northern Andes), were Atahualpa was recovering.

All seemed calm at first, with the Inca king agreeing to meet with Pizarro the following day and serving his ambassadors with refreshments. However, the niceties came to an end the next morning when, having met Pizarro and his men as agreed, Atahualpa was insulted (likely due to a mistake in interpretation by his translator) by the invader's demands and then refused to bow to their display of superiority. The Battle of Cajamarca ensued, with the well-armed and disciplined Spanish cutting down over 2,000 Incas and capturing Atahualpa.

With its ruler imprisoned (and later executed in 1533 by strangulation, having had his sentence of death by burning commuted upon his agreement to convert to Catholicism) and the Spanish forces on the march, the Inca Empire began to unravel, despite the efforts of generals loyal to Atahualpa.

Successive Sapa Incas failed to reverse the decline, and, despite a vicious power struggle between Pizarro and his fellow Conquistador Diego de Almagro that ended with the latter's murder in 1538, the Incas couldn't fully exploit the situation, even though they did rebel against their oppressors for years. By 1572 the final flickers of hope for an Inca rebirth were extinguished, with Spain able to lay claim to the majority of South America. Today, only the ruins of the great Inca settlements stand testament to the brilliance of its people and the cruelty of their demise.


This statue of Pachacuti stands in the Plaza de Armas in Cuzco, southern Peru



The expansion of the Inca Empire along the west coast of South America

Cunning and clever, daring and determined, Hernán Cortés cut a swathe through Central America and became an inspiration to many later conquistadores

THE SPANISH EMPIRE

A thirst for new worlds led to an empire with riches and power on a global scale that declined as dramatically as it had grown

Written by June Woolerton

It stretched from Asia to the Americas and entrenched its roots so deeply that more than a century after it came to an end, its influence continues to be felt. The Spanish Empire was one of the greatest global powers ever seen, bringing untold wealth to its rulers and unimaginable grievances to some of those whose lands were conquered in its fast-moving and ambitious expansion. It left a legacy of language, religion and culture in lands thousands of miles from its heart and yet its size became its enemy and led, in part, to its disintegration.

Spain's empire exploded onto the world stage in a fit of violent conquest that dominated the politics of the 16th century. The crowns of Aragon and Castile had only just been united through the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella when the Genoese explorer Christopher Columbus arrived at their court, hoping to finally win backing for his plans to sail for Asia. The king and queen, fresh from the successes of their Reconquista, which had seen them drive the final Muslim populations from Spain, poured cash into the project that would change the world forever. Their faith was soon rewarded. On 12 October 1492, Columbus caught sight of a land he named 'San Salvador' and within weeks, an imperial power had begun to take shape.

Columbus returned to Europe in early 1493, still believing he had landed in part of Asia. Forced to stop in Portugal on his way back to Spain, he described his discoveries to the country's king, John II, who was ambitious to expand his own holdings around India. Furious and fearful that his attempts to conquer new lands for Portugal would be damaged, John began negotiations with Ferdinand and Isabella leading to the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, which divided freshly found territories outside Europe along an imaginary line. While almost impossible to enforce, this barrier, which gradually nudged to around the midway point of modern South America, would end up shaping the Spanish Empire for centuries to come.

The excitement caused by Columbus' return to Spain led to a rush of expeditions in the following decades, although it wasn't until Italian explorer Amerigo Vespucci joined the push westwards that it was discovered this ever-growing fleet of ships and conquerors were in fact heading to a 'New World', separate from Asia. Vespucci proved the lands targeted by Spanish sailors weren't part of the Indies Columbus had dreamed of reaching, but instead a completely different land mass that would take a form of his first name, America. Soon afterwards, Vasco Núñez de Balboa charged across the central part of this newly found continent to become the first European to see the Pacific. He claimed the ocean for his king, Ferdinand II, and this, along with the establishment of control over most of the Caribbean islands occurring at the same time, provided Spain with a power base for even more ambitious conquests.

The ancient empires of the newly found Americas began to tumble to the ambitious new imperial power. The Spanish were lured in part by their continuing desire to explore, but also by the promise of wealth. As they became aware of the abundance of gold and precious metals in the lands that lay before them, the Spanish conquerors became more daring and more determined.

In 1519, Hernán Cortés took command of an expedition to the Aztec Empire in Mexico. Partly with the help Malinalli, one of the local women given to him as an offering on his arrival in Mexico who became his interpreter and then lover, Cortés began to cut into the Aztec power base. Within a year, the Aztec emperor Montezuma II was a Spanish puppet. His death in 1520 was followed by a swift conquest aided by the Tlaxcala, longtime foes of the Aztecs, who helped Cortés win complete control of the wealthy lands by 1521.

A decade later, Francisco Pizarro led a difficult foray into Peru and the land of the Incas, and following the pattern set by Cortés, looked to turn its ruler, Atahualpa, into a powerless frontman while he ruled in his place. Following a gruesome massacre at Cajamarca in 1532, the Incan emperor was held hostage, but he promised his captors a room filled with gold as a ransom. Over 30 tons of precious metals were produced before the Spanish decided to execute him anyway. By 1533, Peru was completely subjugated and became the base from which large parts of South America would come under total Spanish control.

The speed of the conquest took Spain's European counterparts by surprise, but it was less shocking to those involved. Columbus had noted of his first meetings with the inhabitants of San Salvador that "I could conquer the whole of them with 50 men, and govern them as I pleased". While they were vastly outnumbered wherever they landed, the Spanish brought with them the advantages of horsepower and weaponry far more powerful and sophisticated than anything their opponents had ever seen. They also brought Western germs and as diseases like smallpox took hold in the Americas, populations were devastated within weeks, further weakening their resistance to conquest.

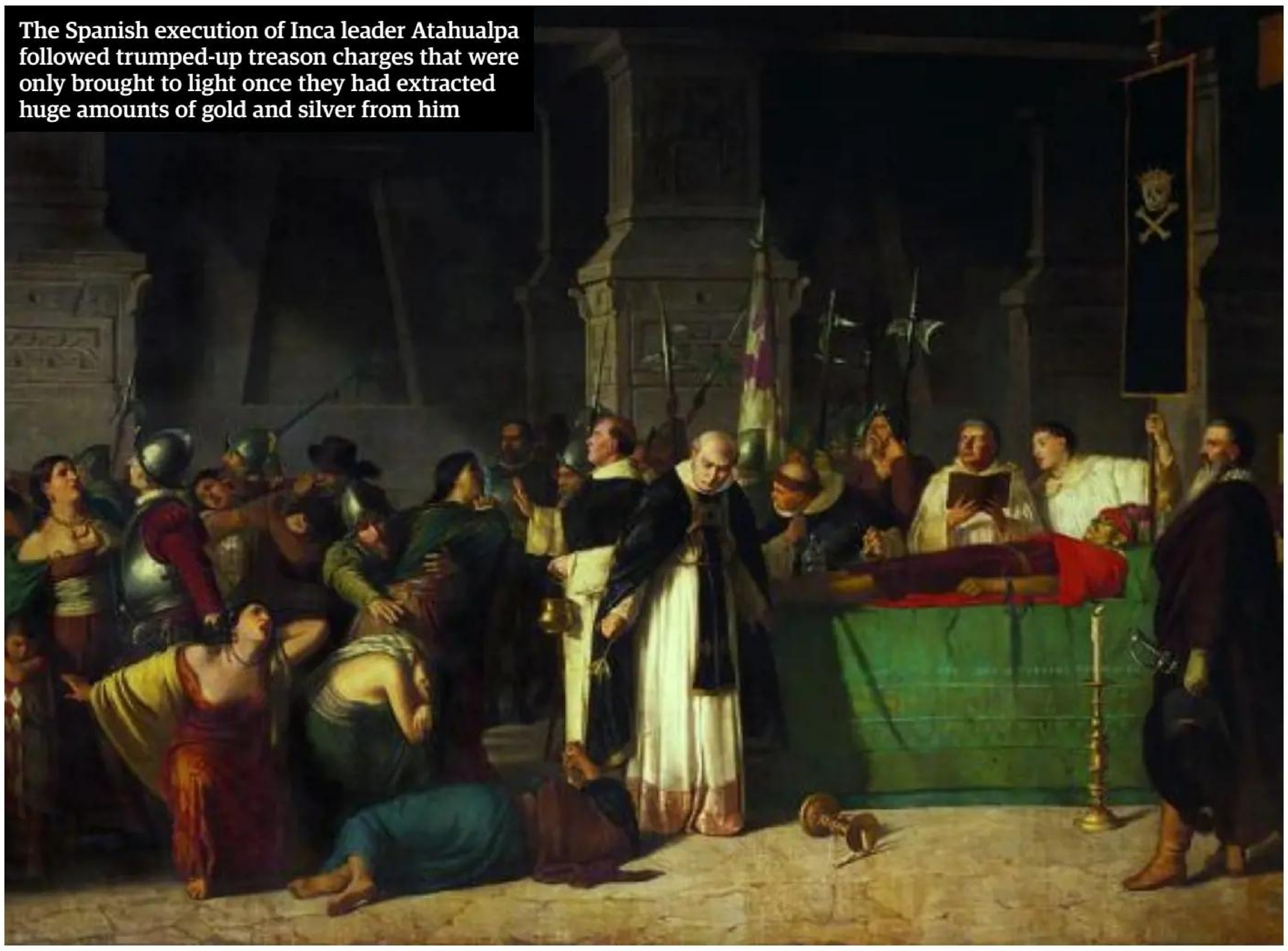
> "At its height, the Sun was always shining on part of Spain's imperial holdings"

At its height, the Sun was always shining on part of Spain's imperial holdings. The South American bases along the Pacific allowed explorers like Ferdinand Magellan to sail into more unchartered territories, and by the mid 16th century, the Philippines belonged to Spain, too. The islands joined a growing list of areas under Spanish power with the empire eventually covering all of the Caribbean, South and Central America, as well as chunks of North America, areas in Africa including Equatorial Guinea and Pacific islands such as Palau.

The imperial holdings were divided into vice royalties. Following the rapid expansion of the 16th century, the Vice Royalty of New Spain ruled from Florida and California in the north, to the Caribbean in the west and as far as Venezuela in the south. The Vice Royalty of New Peru took control of all the other South American holdings. Always under the auspices of the crown, these vice royalties were impressive power bases as well as providing extensive wealth for those who were able to rise to high positions within them.

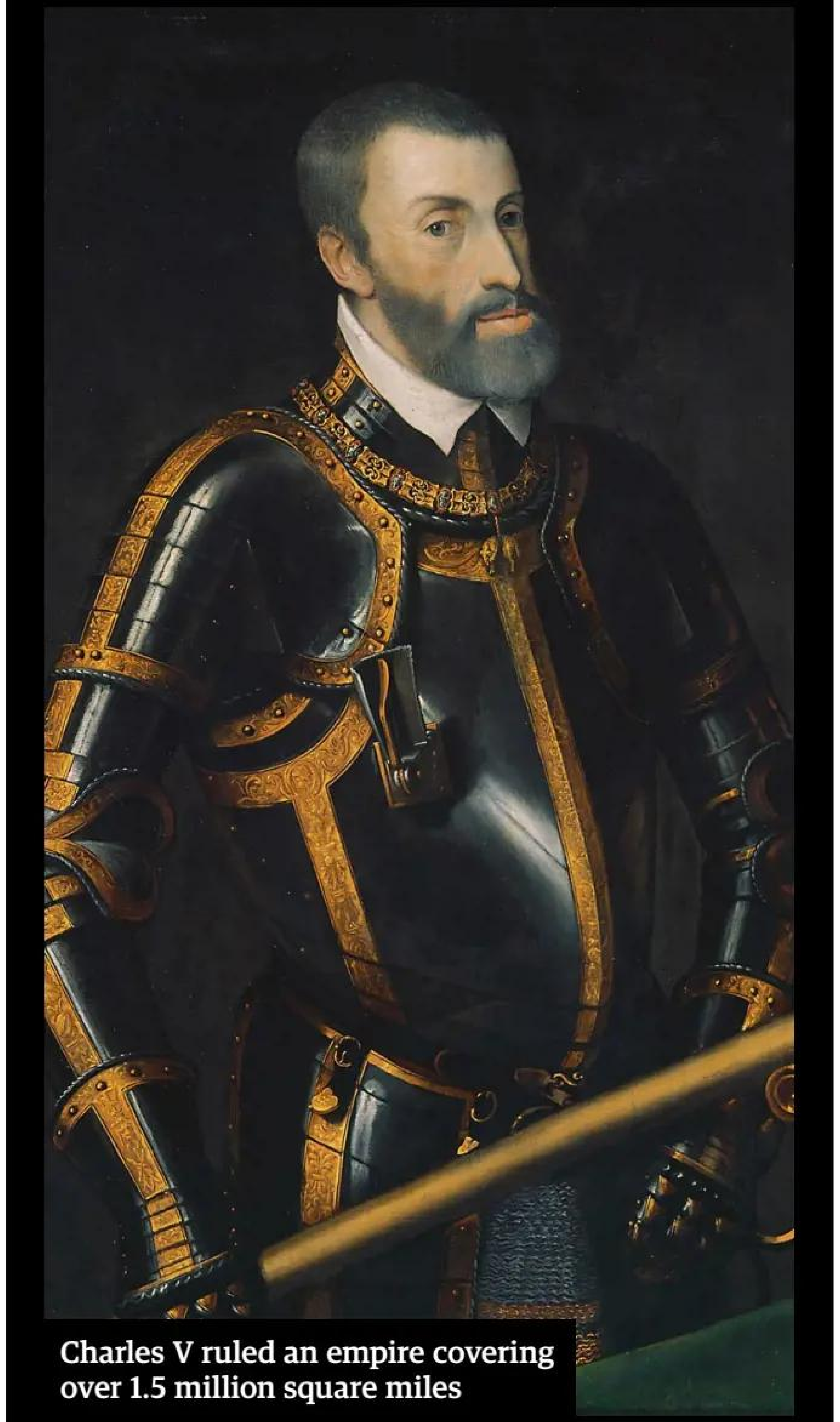
The riches the new empire brought with it were also shared back in Spain. As the economy boomed, Spain's rulers built themselves some of the most impressive regal residences in Europe. They also gave their backing to the arts and literature scene in their country with a surge in ambition and achievement that would become known as El Siglo de Oro, or the Golden Age. Authors Miguel de Cervantes and Lope de Vega, artists Diego Velázquez and El Greco and composers including Tomás Luis de Victoria all flourished during this period, while the country's navy and army became forces to be reckoned with.

The emergence of Spain as a military and cultural power reached its apogee as the Habsburgs took control. Charles V became king of Spain in 1516, not long after inheriting power in the Netherlands, and


The Spanish execution of Inca leader Atahualpa followed trumped-up treason charges that were only brought to light once they had extracted huge amounts of gold and silver from him

THE EMPIRE BUILDER

Charles V became ruler of much of Europe through birth and oversaw an empire that made him the envy of the world

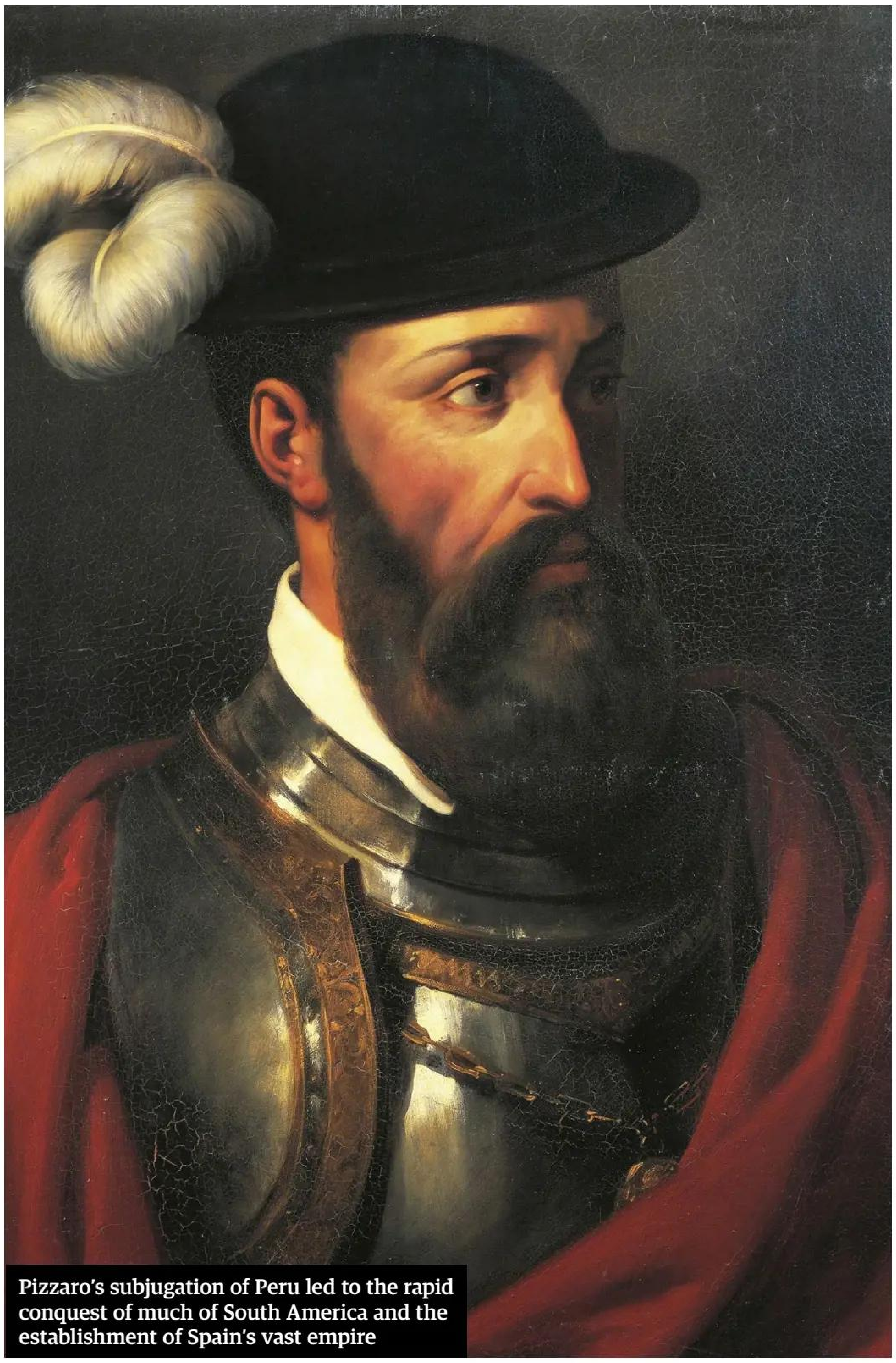

Charles V ruled an empire covering over 1.5 million square miles

In a quiet monastery in a remote setting, an exhausted man spent his last years in a room lined with clocks. He saw few people and passed much of his time writing letters, but this subdued life belied an incredible past. For the man was Charles V, once emperor of the first realm on which the Sun never set.

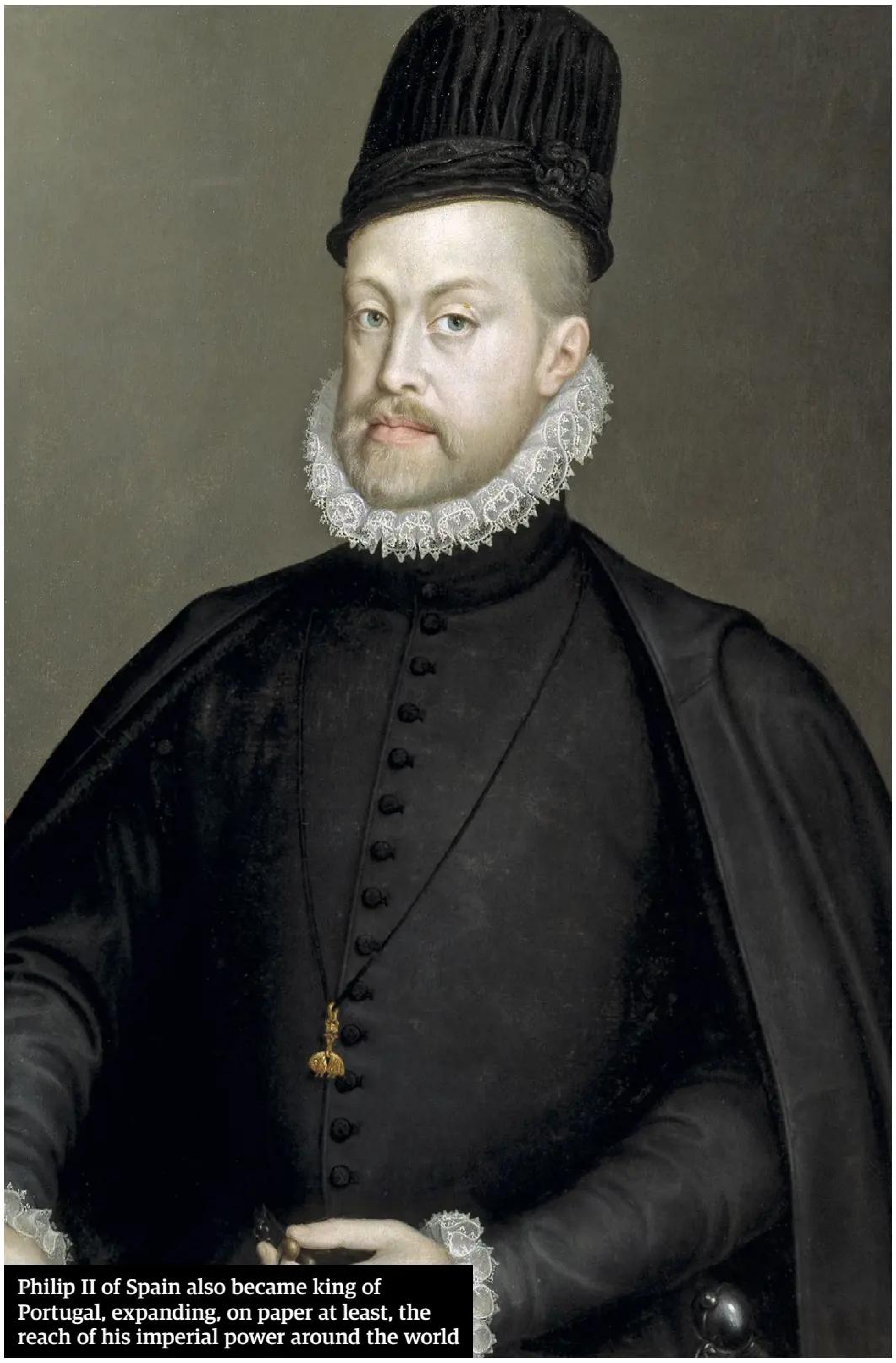
Charles, born in Ghent in 1500, had inherited most of Europe by the time he turned 25. Through his Habsburg father, Philip the Handsome, he succeeded to the Netherlands and the Duchy of Burgundy while his paternal grandfather, Maximilian, left him the Holy Roman Empire. Through his mother, Joanna, he claimed the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon and with them, the already burgeoning Spanish Empire.

Such a huge power base needed vast resources and the imperial holdings provided much-needed cash for Charles. It came at a price. In 1518, he authorised the first direct shipment of slaves from Africa to the Americas, changing the nature of the trade forever and brutalising it further. His constant demands for cash also led to unhappiness with his rule in Spain.

By the time he turned 50, Charles was exhausted. He began to abdicate his power, leaving his vast Holy Roman Empire to his nephew and his Spanish imperial holdings to his son, who became Philip II. He retired to the monastery of Yuste in Extremadura, although kept in touch with government through correspondence. His death in 1558 brought to an end a life that had known power unlike any other in modern Europe but built, in part, on the extreme suffering of many others.



Pizzaro's subjugation of Peru led to the rapid conquest of much of South America and the establishment of Spain's vast empire



Philip II of Spain also became king of Portugal, expanding, on paper at least, the reach of his imperial power around the world

just three years before succeeding as Holy Roman emperor. Much of modern-day Europe came under his rule and the wealth he obtained from his empire allowed him to finance fightbacks against rebellions. His son, Philip II, didn't inherit the Holy Roman Empire, which passed to another wing of the family, but he augmented his own power by grabbing the throne of Portugal in 1581 during a succession crisis.

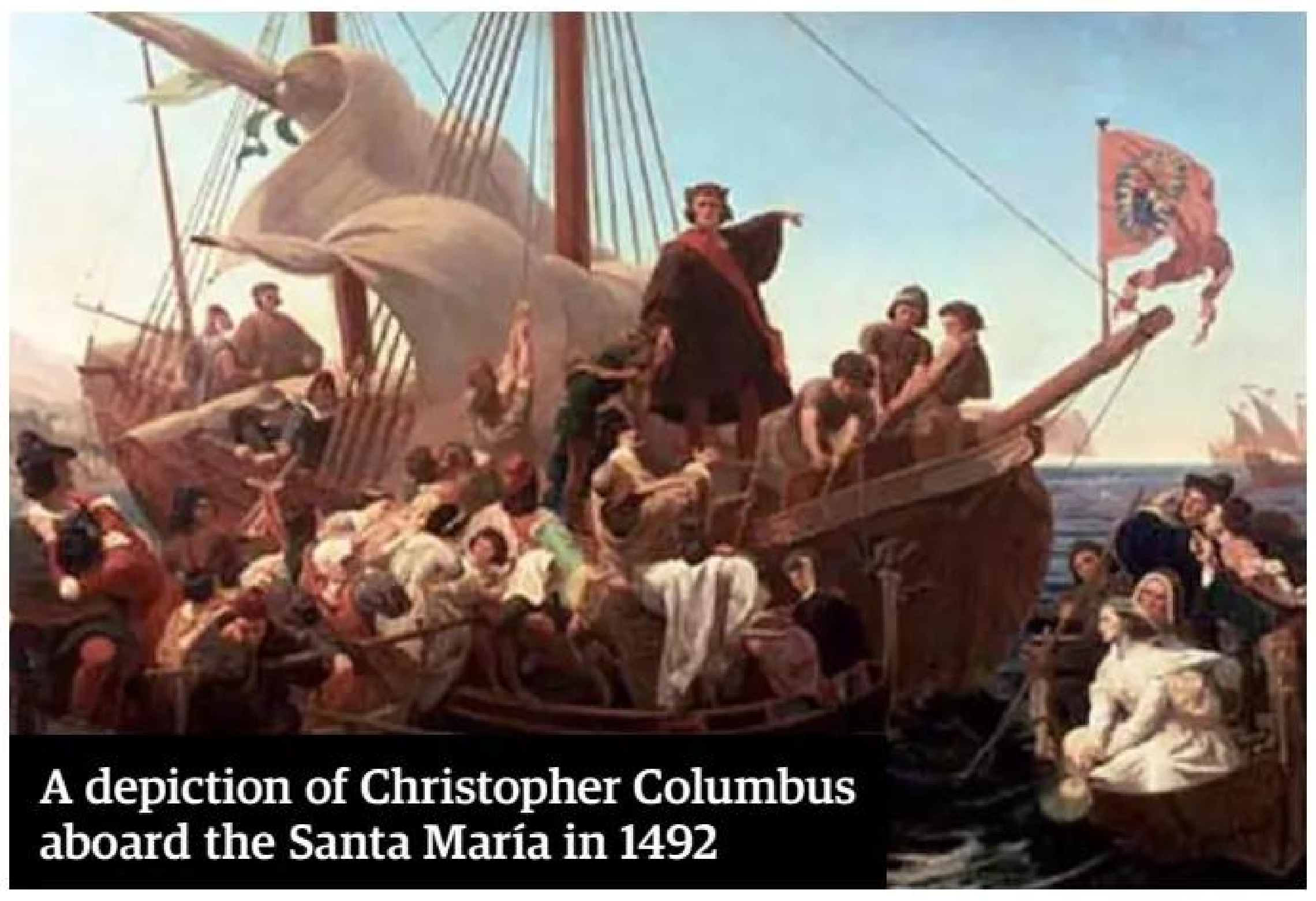
By then, the power of Spain was beginning to weaken. Philip II had run into difficulties trying to keep control of the Spanish Netherlands and costly battles followed. Bankruptcies took their toll on government while the War of Spanish Succession, which saw both France and Austria try to take control of Madrid and its empire in the early 18th century, caused more instability. By then, Spain's global domination had come under threat from French and British expansion as trade routes across the Pacific and Atlantic became more important in bolstering national wealth across Europe.

There was also more opposition to the power and wealth the empire had brought to religious orders, including the Jesuits. In the early years, spiritual conquest had been almost as important as territorial gain. But the missionaries had become administrators, too. The Jesuits were expelled from the Spanish Vice Royalties in 1767, but their departure removed a level of government, so some areas began to loosen their links to imperial control.

In the early 19th century, independence movements sprang up across South and Central America, and under the determined and charismatic leadership of Simón Bolívar, large swathes of the continent broke free from Spain. Madrid had been powerless to stop the calls for freedom after Napoleon invaded and a period of instability, marked by abdications and dynastic warfare, created the perfect vacuum for the empire to drift away. By the time royal power was properly re-established under King Alfonso XII in 1874, most of Spain's holdings were gone. The last holdings in the Americas, Cuba and Puerto Rico, were lost in 1898, while the Philippines were lost the following year.

Spain had never held large parts of Africa, but by the 20th century, its bases on the continent were all that remained of its empire. Through independence movements, these too disappeared and the end of control in the Spanish Sahara in 1975 brought the final curtain down on imperial rule.

The demise of the Spanish Empire was almost as swift as its creation, but its legacy remains vast. Both its language and its religion became integral to South America, where architecture and art still show the deep influences of the empire. Built on bravado and sustained by determination, the Spanish Empire's legacy can still be seen today.



A depiction of Christopher Columbus aboard the Santa María in 1492

© Getty Images

THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

1526-1857

Shah Jahan was able to build the Taj Mahal to house the body of his favourite wife because he was the ruler of an empire that covered most of the Indian subcontinent. The Mughal Empire was a protoindustrial powerhouse, with a quarter of the world's industrial output funding stunning architectural icons in the 17th century.

DAVIS STRAIT
HUDSON BAY
CANADA
BRITISH ISLANDS
NORTH SEA
Arctic Circle
New Orleans
GULF OF
MALTA
ST HELENA
WALVISCH B
TO CAPE OF GOOD HOPE

A TO Z

OF THE

BRITISH EMPIRE

A 26-letter rundown on an empire that ruled the waves and upon which the Sun never set

Written by Jack Griffiths

The British Empire began to assert itself upon the world in the late Tudor period during the reign of Elizabeth I. A queen who openly encouraged exploration and trade, Britons began to make trips to lands far beyond their own nation's borders. After the spectacular defeat of the Spanish Armada, Britannia ruled the waves and was ready to start its empire building.

The strength of the Royal Navy allowed Britain to expand significantly, and by the 18th century, colonies had been set up all over the world. The abundance of land put Britain top of the pile in the world of trade, and this monopoly helped expand the economy while the military became one of the strongest on Earth. The empire would expand and contract over time, but it successfully maintained its supremacy for centuries.

The empire helped spread British culture across the globe. The English language as well as features of its religion, economy, society and politics were incorporated into other cultures. However, by the end of World War II it had become clear that the empire had outstayed its welcome in many colonies, and began to decline. While it may have crumbled, but the memory of its successes and failures will last for centuries to come.

An Australian team pictured at Niagara Falls touring Africa in 1878. By the late 19th century, cricket had already become an international sport

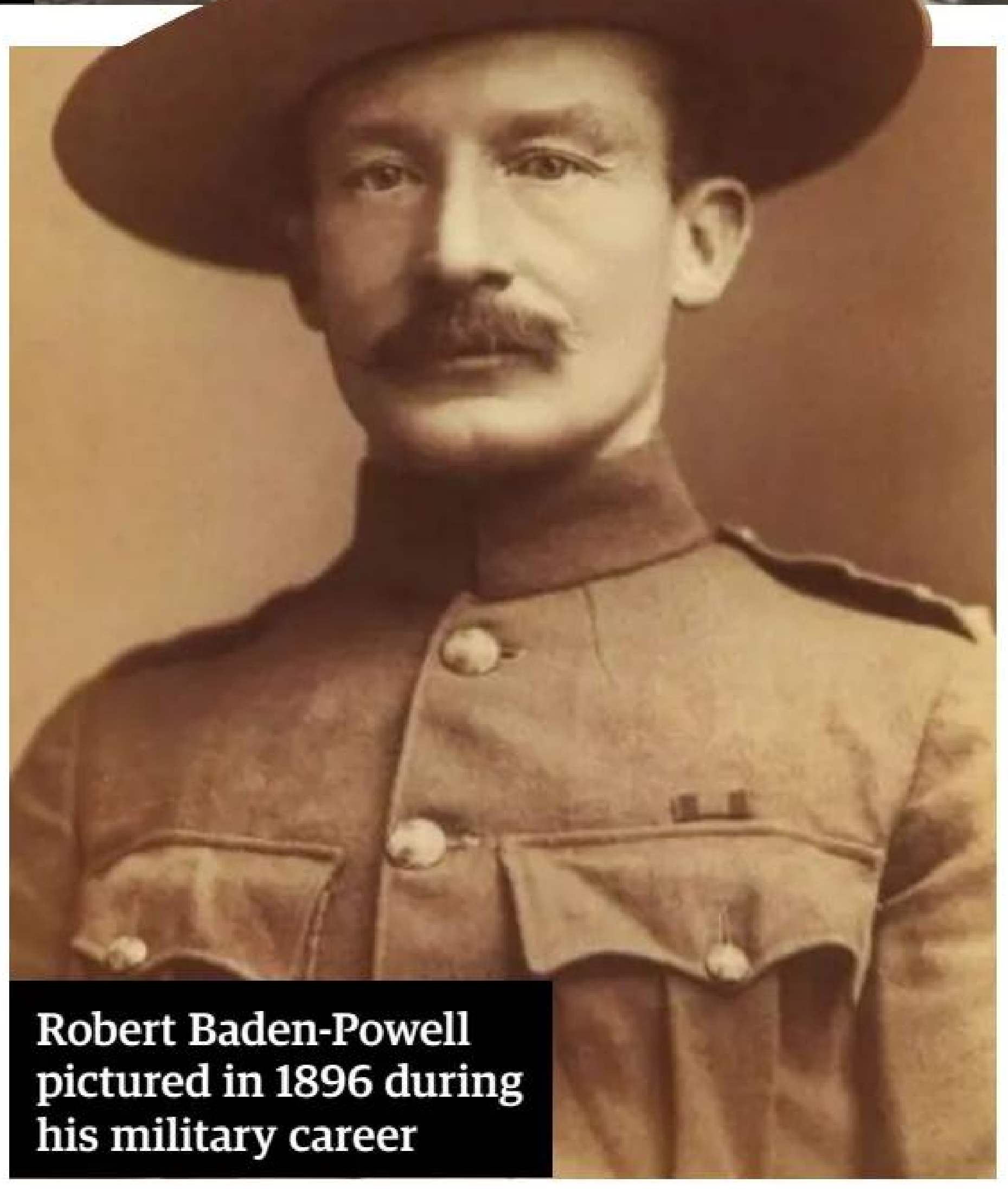
England's Test match against South Africa in 1939 lasted for a mammoth ten days and ended in a draw

Australia

From convict colony to independent settler haven

The loss of America presented Britain with many problems, not least what to do with the huge numbers of convicts now not welcome in the New World. Where would the prisoners go now? The answer was Australia. Convict colonies were first set up in 1788 when 11 ships from the 'First Fleet' arrived. In the 1800s, the country became appealing to settlers, and when gold was found in the 1850s, immigration stepped up as people made the most of the 'Australian gold rush'. The Aboriginal Australians saw their numbers dwindle due to factors like old world diseases and annexation of their land.

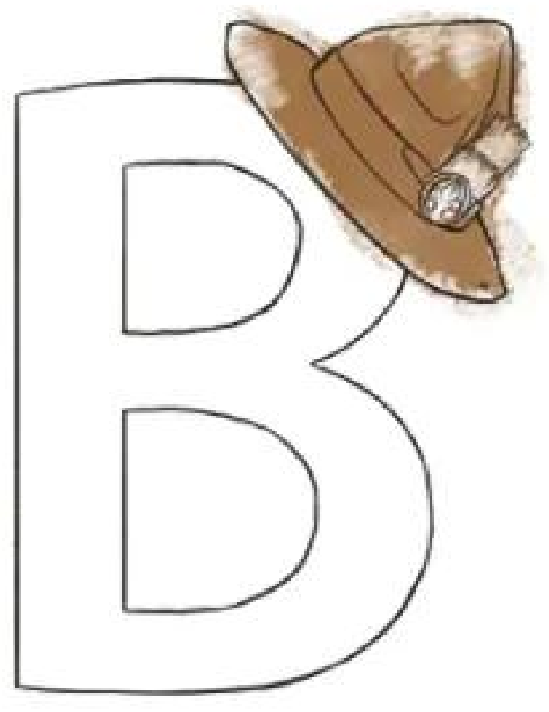
Naturally, Britain now saw the country as a useful economic tool. The gold and wool trade boomed but there were frequent conflicts between the settlers and rulers over taxes and land. In return, the Royal Navy protected Australia from the German and French Empires, but this was not enough, and by the 1880s, the communities began to think of themselves as 'Australian' and the empire's grip loosened. The population was growing at three per cent a year while national wealth was increasing at double the rate of Britain's. Despite an economic slump in 1890, Australia became independent in 1901. However, Australia still rushed to help Britain in World War I as the brave Anzacs fought with distinction at Gallipoli and on the Western Front.



Robert Baden-Powell pictured in 1896 during his military career

Baden-Powell

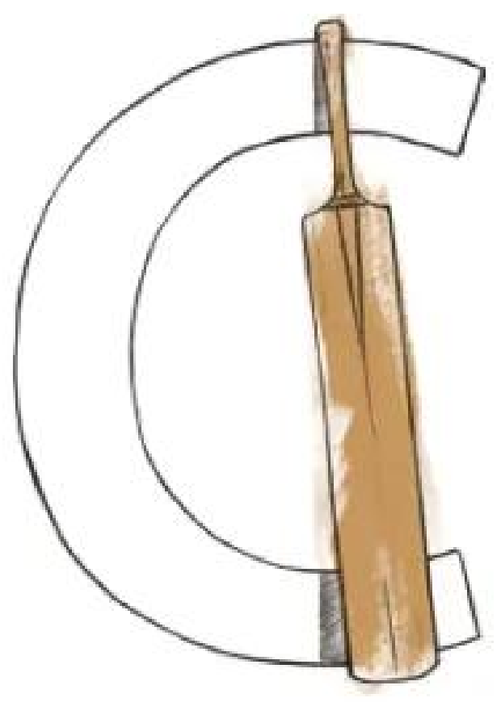
"Life without adventure would be deadly dull"



A man who always preferred the great outdoors to the confines of the classroom, Robert Baden-Powell was obsessed with adventure. The colonel's finest hour would come in Africa during the 1899-1900 Siege of Mafeking. The siege was during the Second Boer War, a vicious conflict that pitted the British Empire against the Orange Free State. 20 special service officers, including Baden-Powell, were sent to defend the frontier. They were surrounded in the town but managed to hold out against 7,000 Boers for 217 days. The now Major-General Baden-Powell was a hero, but within a few years he had turned his attention from military to scouting. The first book of the movement, *Scouting for Boys*, was written in 1908 and from here, the organisation developed rapidly.

Cricket

The game of the empire had sinister origins



Now commonly played in many Commonwealth countries, cricket's popularity spread quickly through the colonies of the British Empire. The 1787 founding of the MCC (Marylebone Cricket Club) and passing of the 1788 Code of Laws kickstarted the professionalisation of the sport, which was first played in Barbados in 1806 and South Africa in 1808. Cricket was also embraced elsewhere in the empire and the sound of leather on willow was heard in Australia, New Zealand, India and the Caribbean. Cricket wasn't just a sport, though - it was used as a political tool by the British. The rules and regulations were used to remind the indigenous people of the hierarchy between them and the white settlers. It reinforced racial stereotypes and was a symbol of social control. It was seen as a crude way of spreading civilised values to those who the British Empire deemed uncivil. The empire always based itself on an aura of superiority, and this control continued even after the abolition of slavery.

Cricket remained a popular pastime even after many of the colonies gained independence. Now it was the sport of the people rather than a symbol of oppression. The most famous contest between Australia and England was held in 1882. The former colony recorded a shock victory causing the *Sporting Times* to remark that "English Cricket had died". The Ashes were born and the sport became even more popular than before.

The Life Of Robert Baden-Powell

Born
1857
Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden-Powell is born in London on 22 February.

Childhood
1860
Known as 'BP' or 'Stephe' he had nine siblings. Sadly, his father dies when he is just three years old.

Charterhouse
1870
Baden-Powell is educated at one of the most prestigious schools in the country.

Army career
1876
After failing to get in to college, he joins the army, becoming captain at 26.

Siege survival
1899-1900
Baden-Powell's unit holds out for 217 days in the siege of Mafeking during the Second Boer War.

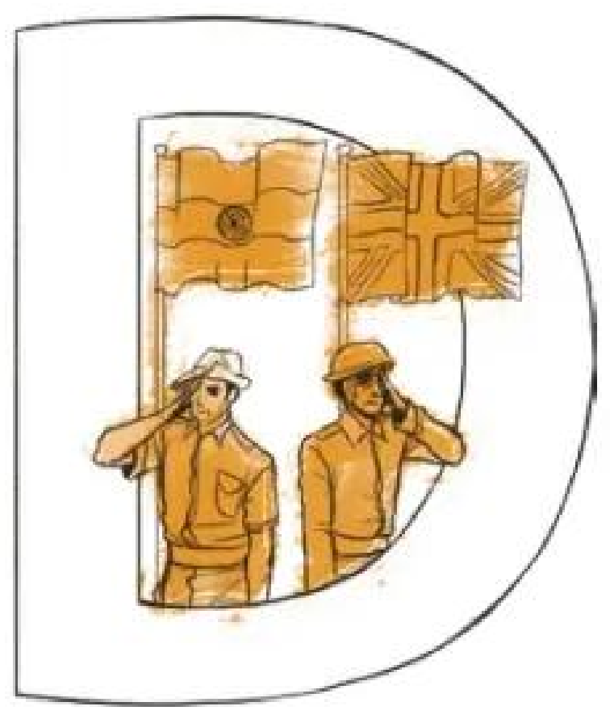
Scouting
1907-08
Leaving the army behind, he forms the Scouting Movement and publishes the bestselling book *Scouting for Boys*.

Married
1912
He meets Olave Soames, who has three children with Baden-Powell and helps set up the Girl Guides.

Death
1941
After years of travelling and promoting the Scouts, Baden-Powell dies on 8 January in Kenya.

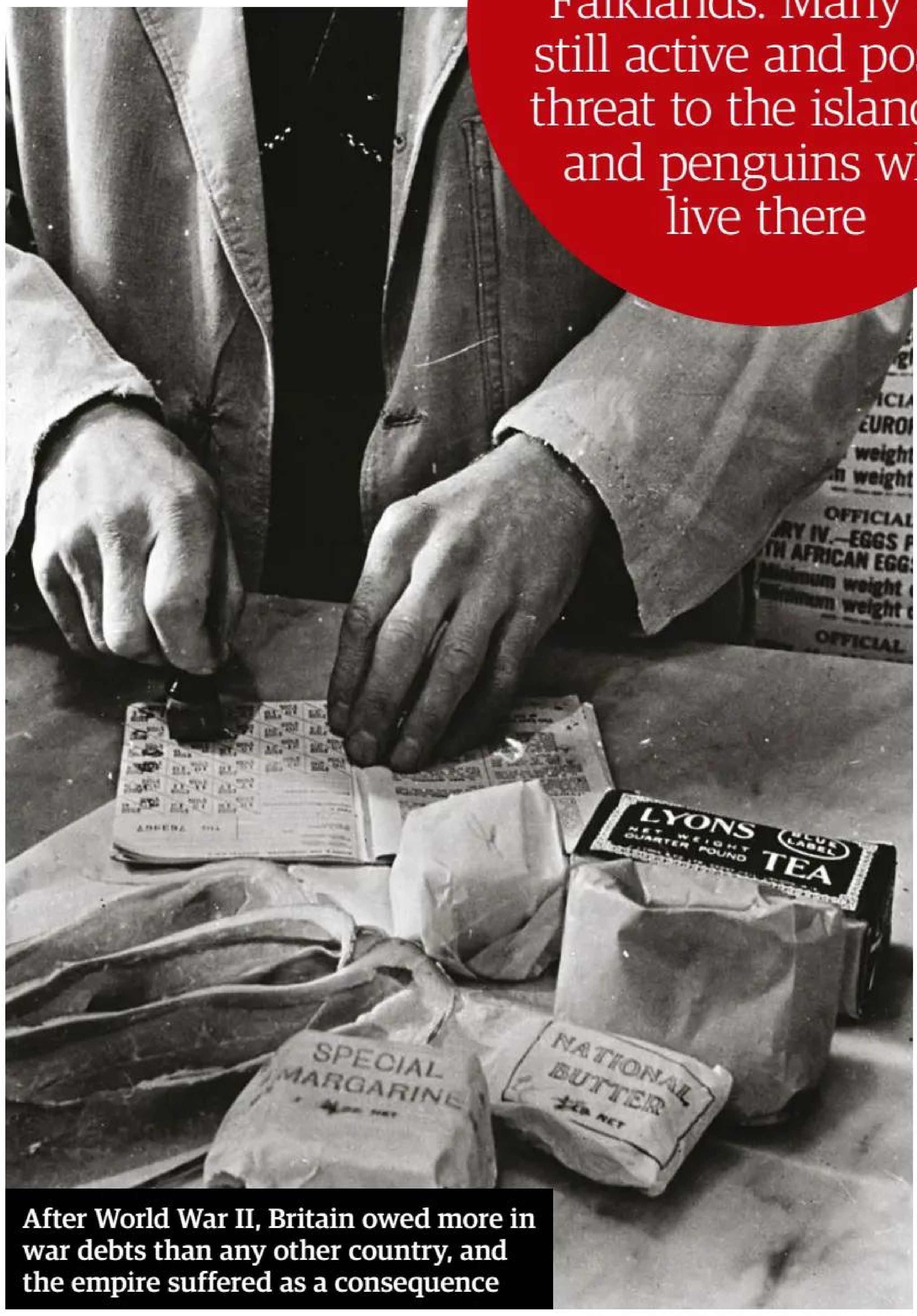
Decolonisation

The sun sets on the British Empire



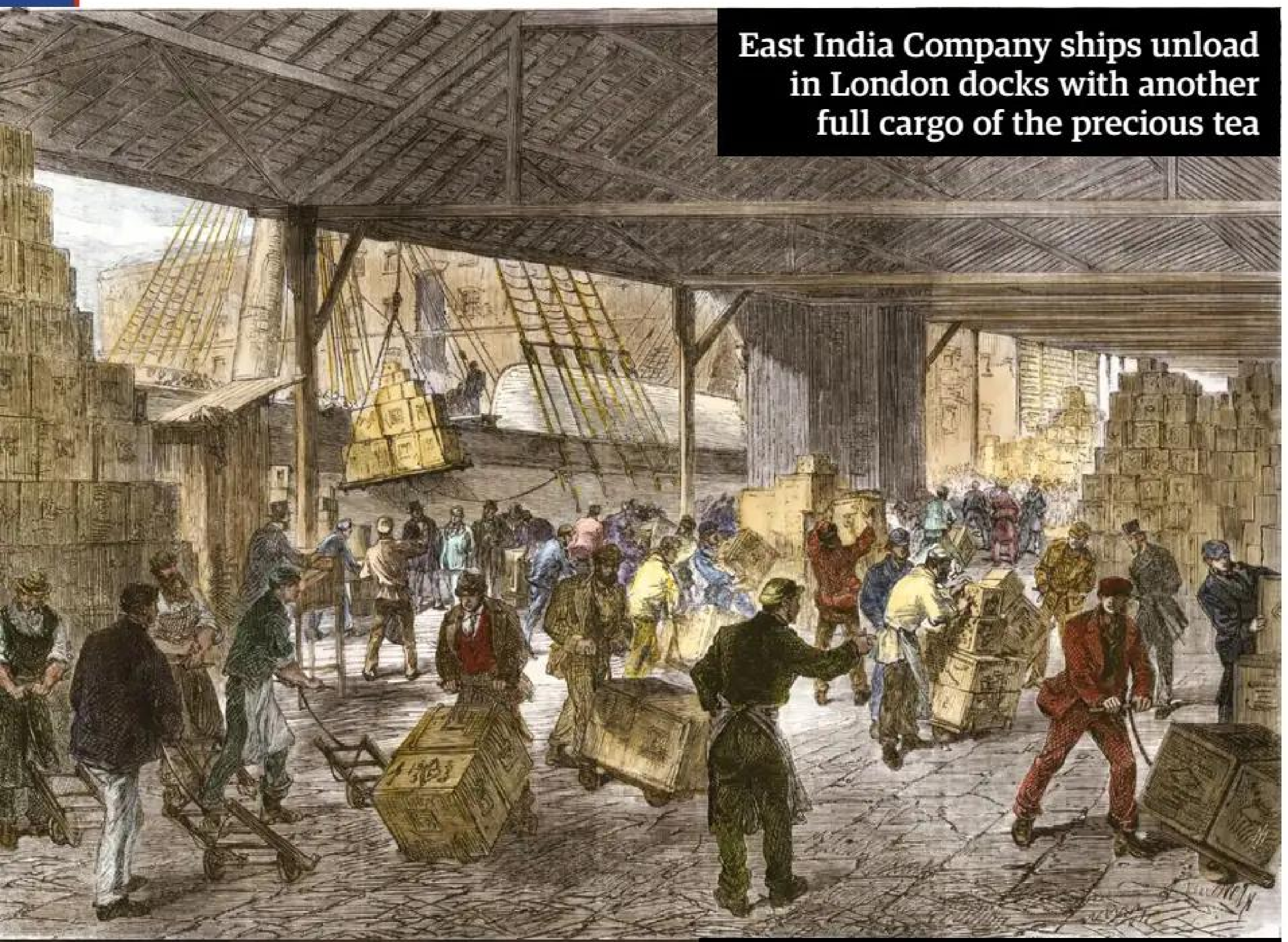
Despite emerging victorious from World War II, the conflict had adverse effects on what was now a failing empire. Britain may still have had the largest empire of all, but as two new world power blocs, the USSR and the USA, arose, the country became a weak link and, financially crippled, was forced to abandon its treasured possessions. The road to oblivion began with the 1947 partition of India, just five years after the suppression of the Quit India movement in 1942. A huge loss, the empire's military muscle was quickly diminishing. Worse was still to come with the Suez Crisis of 1956. Losing control of the economically important Suez Canal, this event wrecked Britain's finances, military and international standing further.

As Britain began to rebuild its fractured cities and towns after war, it had no resources to maintain an empire that had been experiencing a wave of nationalism for a long time. Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika were all independent by 1963 and the White Settler Revolt in Southern Rhodesia in 1965 was another example of the decline of British military power. The fragmentation of the empire was down to a lack of funds and British weakness, but also due to many of the colonies' profound efforts on the Allied side in the war. Britain's entry to the EEC in 1973 effectively ended its imperial ambitions, and the idea of empire could now only be seen in traditions and culture, not frontiers and firearms.

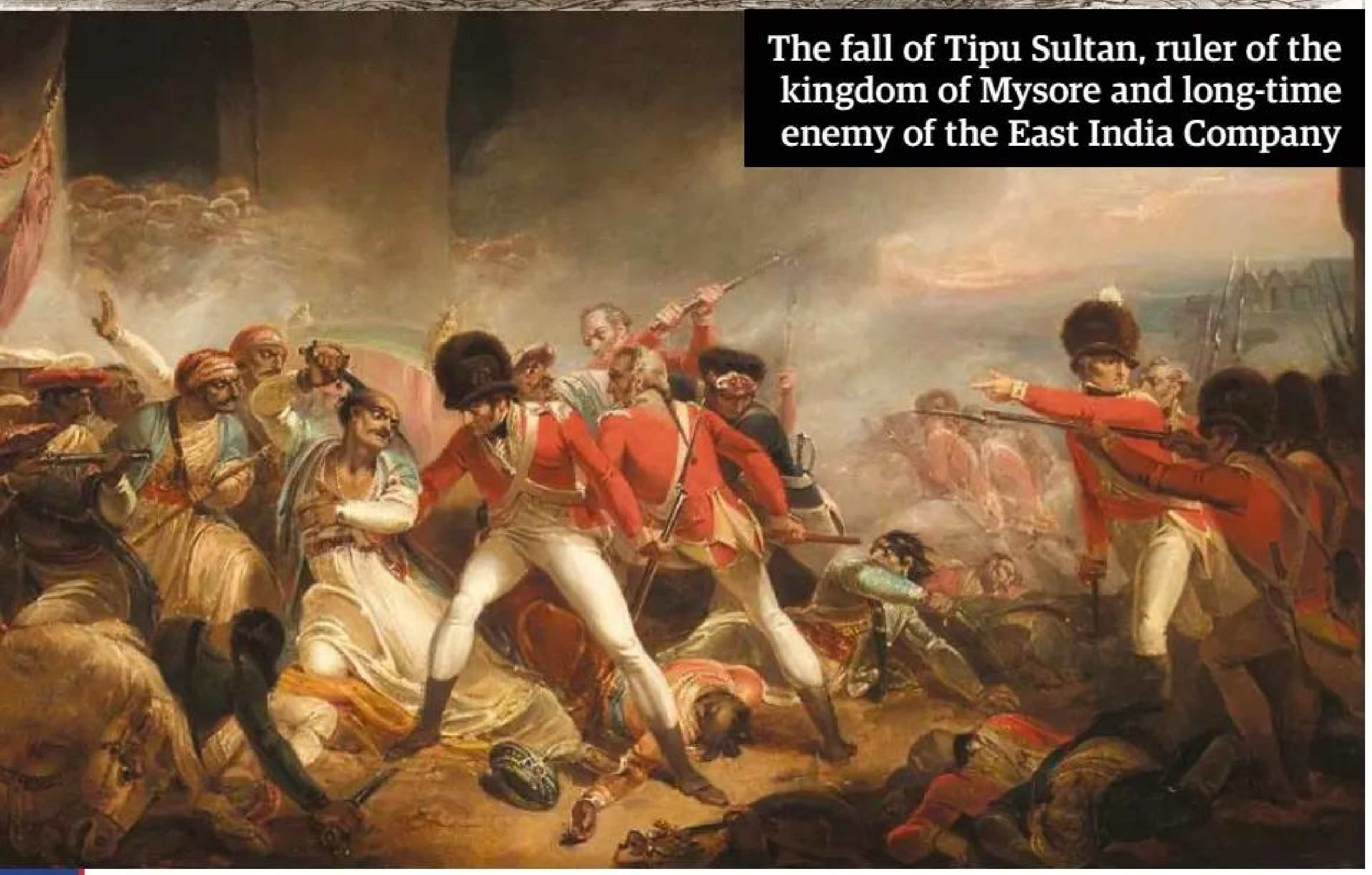


After World War II, Britain owed more in war debts than any other country, and the empire suffered as a consequence

The Argentineans laid 25,000 mines on the Falklands. Many are still active and pose a threat to the islanders and penguins who live there



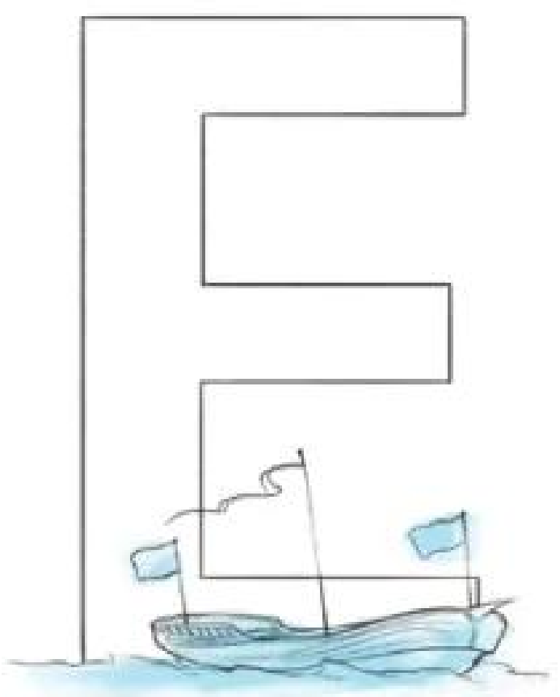
East India Company ships unload in London docks with another full cargo of the precious tea



The fall of Tipu Sultan, ruler of the kingdom of Mysore and long-time enemy of the East India Company

East India Company

The company that evolved from minor trader to outright ruler

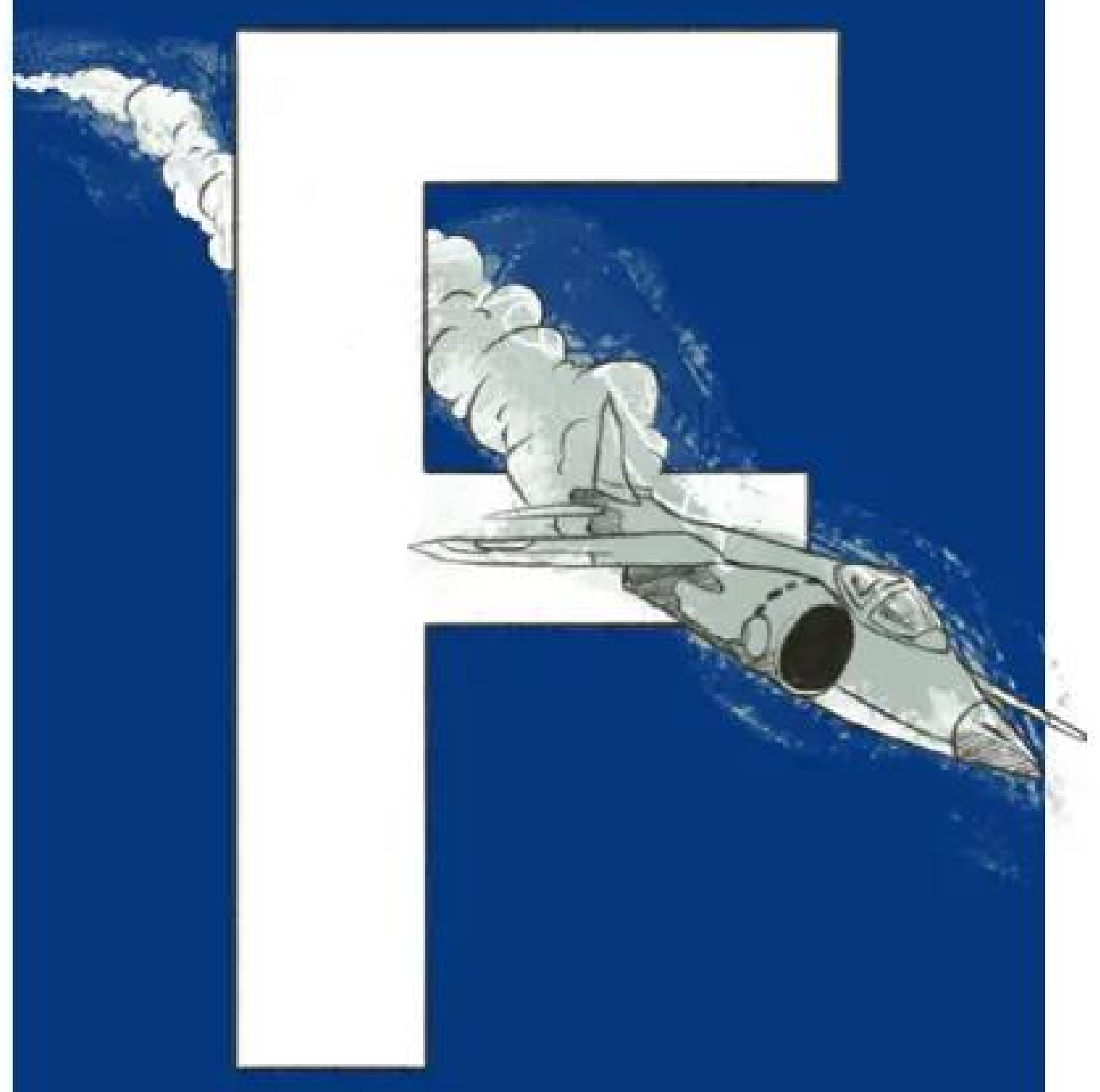


One of the empire's major institutions, the East India Company was a business juggernaut at its peak. The organisation's roots originate in 1601 when British ships first set sail to the 'East Indies'. Hearing of the wealth of spices and materials available, more and more ships made the journey and the trade links began to grow. The British weren't the first European power to make the journey, but they pumped resources into the business venture, and had trading centres all over the west and east coasts of India by 1690. As British influence increased and the Indian Mughal Empire weakened, trade began to turn into occupation. The company could now charge high taxes and defend its interests with force. This had a disastrous effect on the local Indian communities, who saw their economy and society effectively taken over.

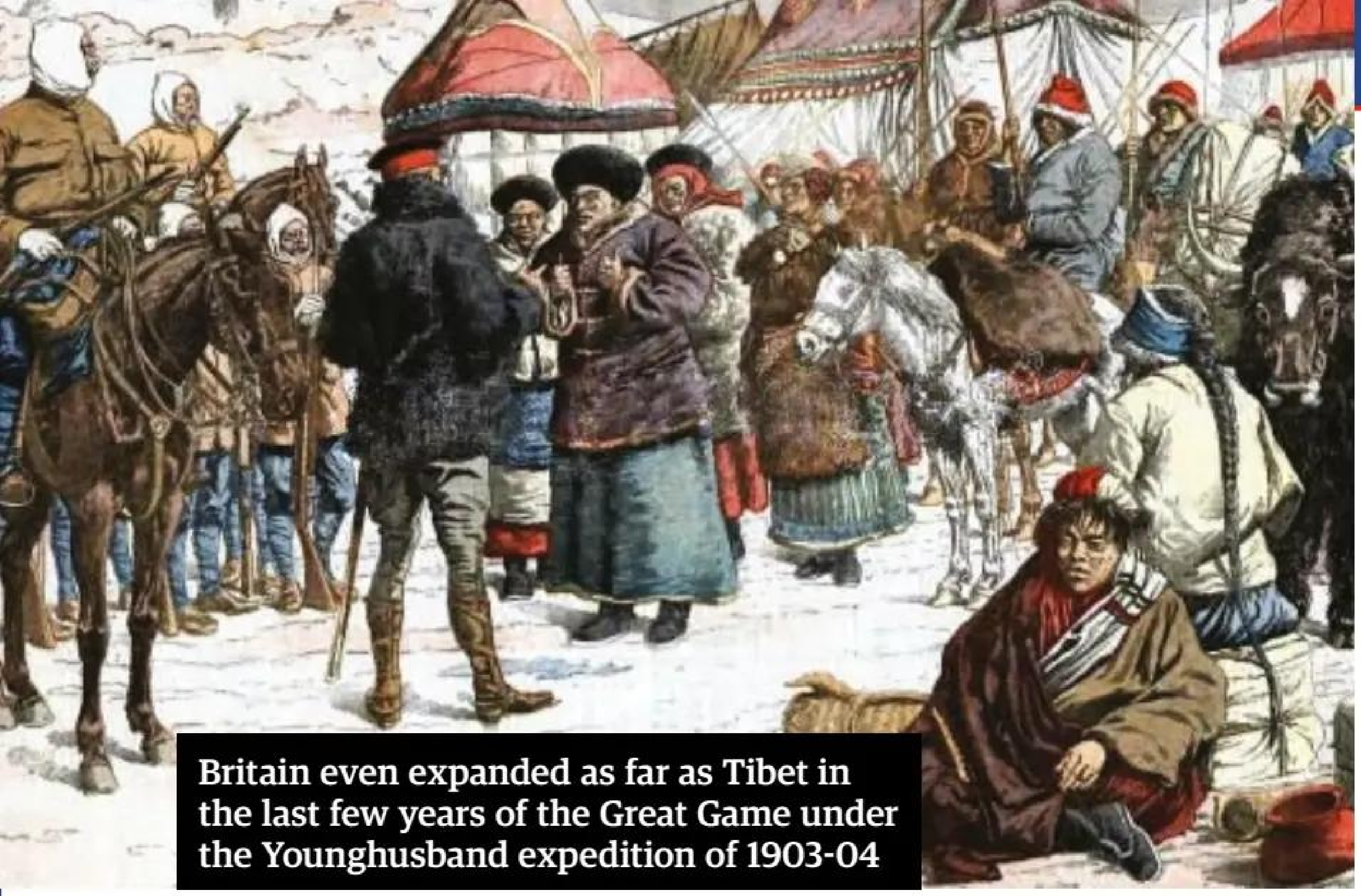
The East India Company was at its most profitable in the first half of the 18th century as Indian cotton was being mass exported, providing British consumers with cheap, good-quality clothing. The company soon began to take more than it was giving as it started to meddle in Indian politics. This caught the attention of the British government, who took the decision to put the firm under government control in 1783. The East India Company is an example of British trade outstaying its welcome, and its harsh affect on India helped develop a nationalist feeling within the country. By 1858, it was abolished completely and the British Raj was created.

Falklands War

The nation's determined cling to territory



By the 1980s the empire was no more, but Britain was still determined to protect what was left of its legacy. The Falkland Islands, a remote colony in the South Atlantic, was one of the few remaining territories. Neighbouring Argentina's military dictatorship, under Leopoldo Galtieri, decided to invade on 2 April 1982, citing its inheritance from Spain and geographical location as reasons for its occupation. Going against advice from other nations, Margaret Thatcher's government decided the UK had to fight back. The conflict lasted for two months and 649 Argentine and 255 British servicemen lost their lives along with three islanders. The Argentinean surrender came on 13 July.



Britain even expanded as far as Tibet in the last few years of the Great Game under the Younghusband expedition of 1903-04

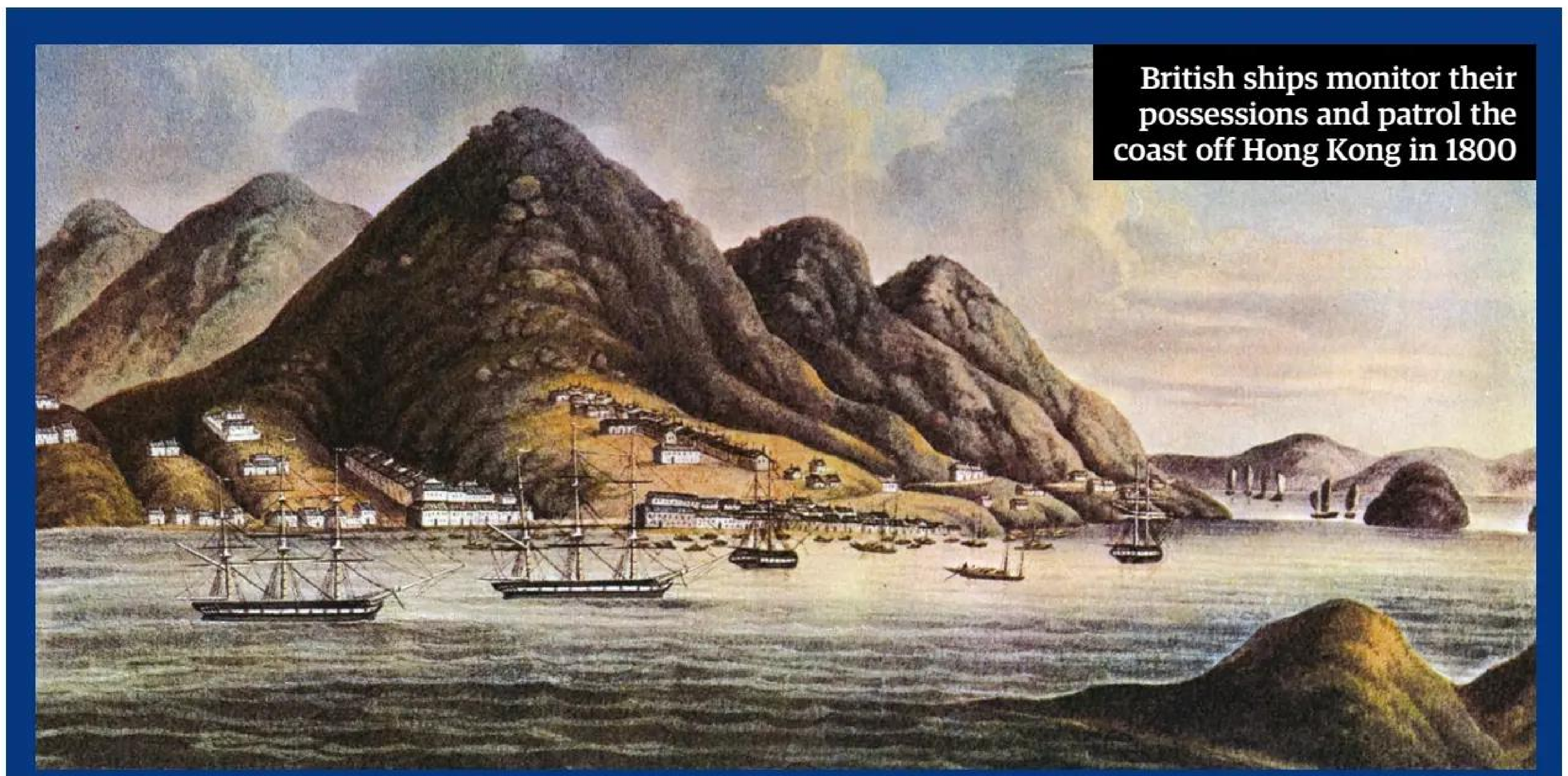
Great Game

The Cold War of the 19th century that put Britain and Russia on the brink of war

The signing of the Russo-Persian Treaty in 1813 alarmed the British. Concerned at the recent expansion of Russian interests in Asia, the British Crown moved to protect India by expanding its own empire northwards. The battleground between the two blocs ended up being Afghanistan, which acted as a buffer zone between the two powers. Britain wanted to use Afghanistan for its own imperial desires, resulting in three wars. The most prominent was the Second Anglo-Afghan War, in which a British victory gained a new protectorate for the empire.

The Great Game also played out in Persia. Originally an ally of the British, Persia switched its support to Russia in 1825 and was persuaded in 1837 to attack Herat, a British territory in Afghanistan. The attack was beaten back by the British but Persia stayed Russian until the Crimean War in 1853. The Great Game officially ceased with the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, ending almost 100 years of tension and conflict. Persia was divided between the two superpowers, and Afghanistan remained a British protectorate until it gained independence after World War I.

> The phrase 'Great Game' was coined by British Intelligence officer Arthur Conolly and popularised by Rudyard Kipling



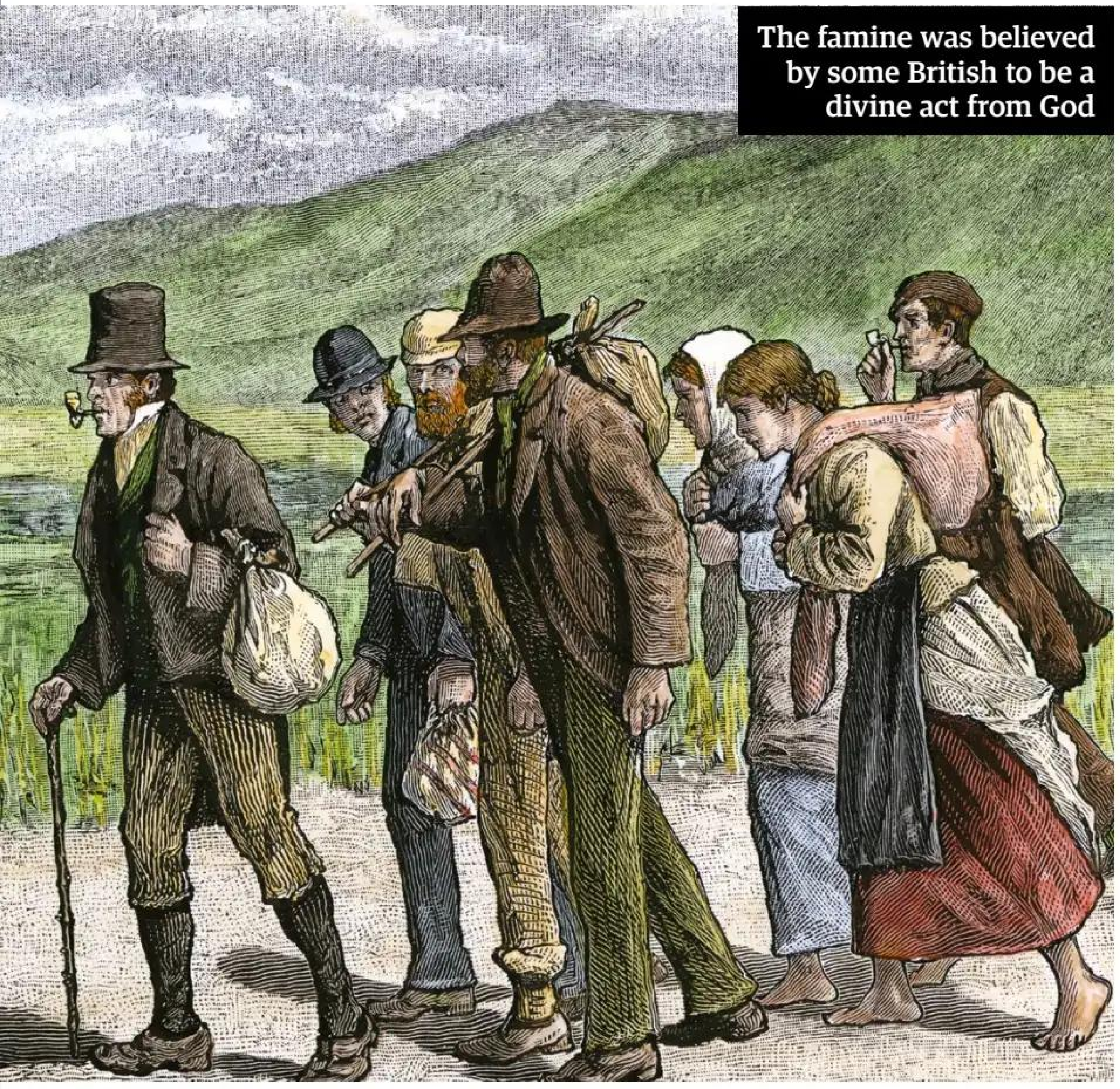
British ships monitor their possessions and patrol the coast off Hong Kong in 1800

Hong Kong

An important trading centre that was almost constantly ravaged by war and conflict

The East India Company arrived in Hong Kong in 1635 keen to trade with both the Chinese and the Portuguese, who had major cartels in the area. Silk, spices and tea were essential commodities for the British, but trade was restricted by the Chinese government, who insisted that all trade went through the port of Canton and select Chinese merchants. By the 1800s, opium had become the major product in the region and in an effort to end the First Opium War, Hong Kong was ceded to the British in 1841.

After the wars were over, Britain signed a lease in 1898 that gave it ownership over the island for 99 years. During World War II, the island was completely taken over by the Japanese. The occupation lasted until 1945, but afterwards, Hong Kong was forced to adapt to the new communist China. It adjusted well, with an economic revival in the 1950s that helped it develop into a financial powerhouse by the 1970s. In 1997, the British lease on Hong Kong expired and China demanded its return. The British government initially tried to negotiate but soon realised the potential administrative and economic difficulties, and backed down. Hong Kong's loss represented the last economically viable colony to leave the empire. The imperial adventure was over.



The famine was believed by some British to be a divine act from God

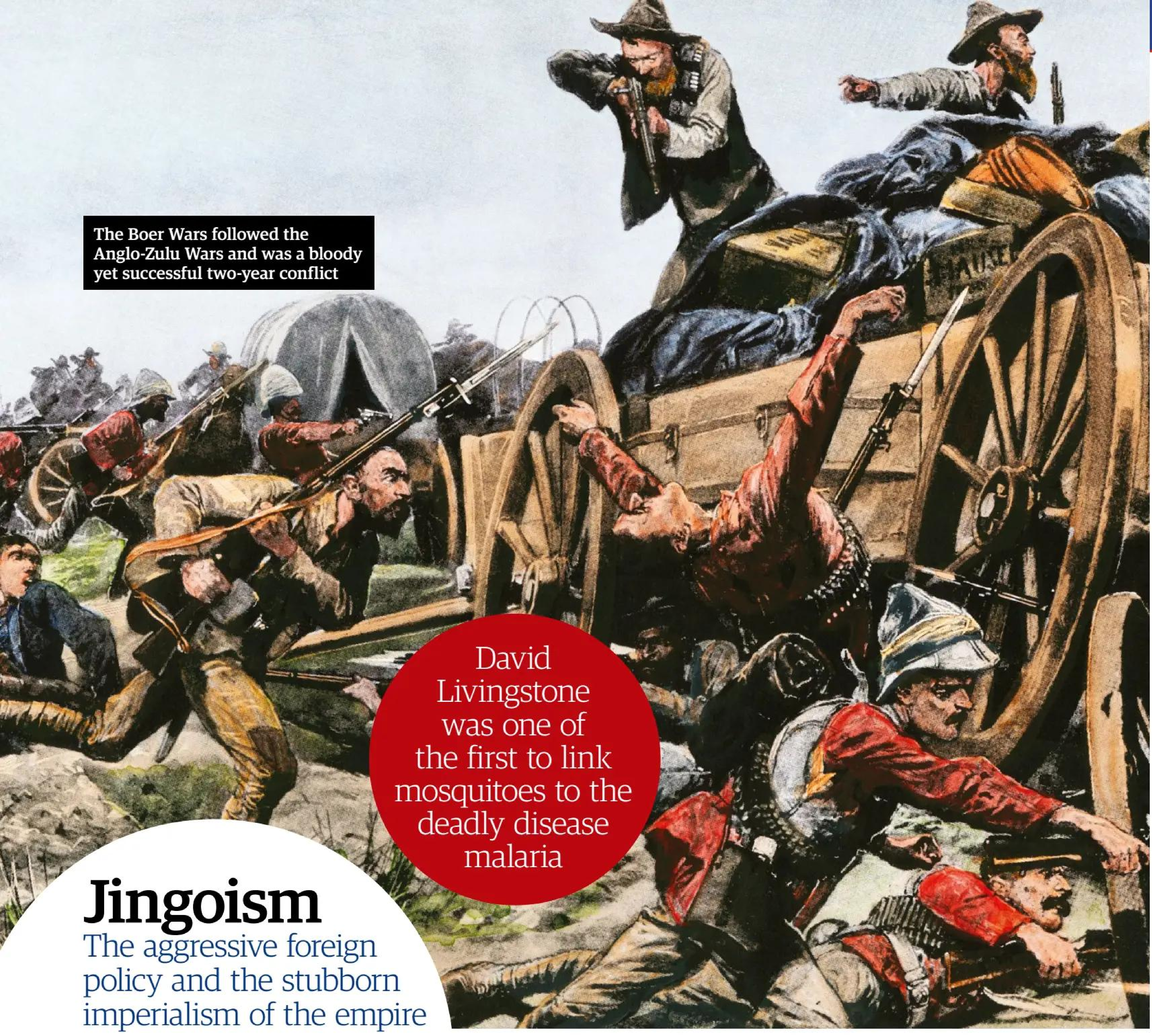
Irish famine

More than 1 million people died in a disaster that the British government failed to act upon and improve

The effects of the potato famine were devastating for the Emerald Isle. An estimated 1 million (a staggering one-eighth of the country's population) died and 1 million more emigrated elsewhere to avoid starving to death. Potatoes had been the staple food of Ireland but they became inedible as a blight disease spread around the crops, turning them into black gooey messes. A 50 per cent loss in crops crippled the country for three successive harvests from 1845 to 1847.

The British Whig and Tory governments decided to be as laissez-faire as possible over the issue of Ireland. Preventing the export of Irish grain to elsewhere would have been an effective policy, but it was not enacted as the government virtually disengaged itself from the problems of the famine. Ireland did have supplies of corn sent over, but it was either not distributed efficiently, there was no machinery to turn it into flour or it was too pricey for the average Irish person to afford. Also critical was the cancellation of the soup-kitchen scheme after only six months, which had fed 3 million people on a daily basis. The idea of feeding Ireland was simply not on the Whig or Tory agenda and was not considered an imperial responsibility.

A few public works were attempted to relieve the situation but, overall, the British government's ideology of free trade prevented any sort of structured aid. For many, emigration was the only option and the population of Ireland headed to the harbours as America and the New World beckoned.



The Boer Wars followed the Anglo-Zulu Wars and was a bloody yet successful two-year conflict

David Livingstone was one of the first to link mosquitoes to the deadly disease malaria

Jingoism

The aggressive foreign policy and the stubborn imperialism of the empire

Jingoism - the nationalistic and patriotic belief that your country is best - was rife within the empire, especially at its peak in the late 19th century. The aggressive shows of force by Britain to maintain and expand its reach were naturally exaggerated by the press, and clever propaganda put almost anything the empire did in a positive light.

The rise of other superpowers such as Germany and Russia only helped fuel jingoism, resulting in arrogant ideology such as splendid isolation and the naval arms race. Invasion literature of the era such as HG Wells' *The War of the Worlds* also stoked the fires of Russophobia and paranoia.

Jingoism wasn't a new phenomenon (Britain had always had fierce rivalries with Spain and France, for instance) but politicians were worried that a working-class electorate was dangerous to British politics. Both the Conservatives and Liberals came to realise that an assertive foreign policy was the best way to appeal to the public. The wave of jingoism lasted up until World War I, when the people's perception of conflict changed forever.

Kitchener

The British military leader who was immortalised in the famous army recruitment poster

Born in Ireland and educated in Switzerland, Horatio Kitchener (and his instantly recognisable moustache) are now iconic images of Britain and its empire. Kitchener's military career was extensive and lasted from 1871 until his death in 1916. Beginning as a royal engineer, Kitchener's career soon took off, and by 1886 he was appointed governor general of Eastern Sudan. This upward trajectory continued and his efforts in the Mahdist War, and in particular the victory at the battle of Omdurman, made him a national hero back in Britain. Kitchener's methods were not all popular though, and his use of concentration camps in the Boer War was severely criticised.

Nevertheless, Kitchener was made a viscount in 1902 and was promoted to secretary of state for war in 1914. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Kitchener foresaw a long conflict and acted accordingly, creating the New Army. However, it was here that his career took a turn for the worse. He was notoriously difficult to work with and his support for the poorly planned Dardanelles campaign was a turning point; then the shell crisis of 1915 damaged his stock even further.

Kitchener didn't survive the Great War and was killed when aboard the HMS Hampshire, which was sunk on 5 June 1916 by a German mine while on a mission to encourage Russian resistance against Germany. Kitchener had questionable methods when it came to waging war, but he is remembered for the sheer number of men he organised at the start of World War I and, of course, that famous poster.

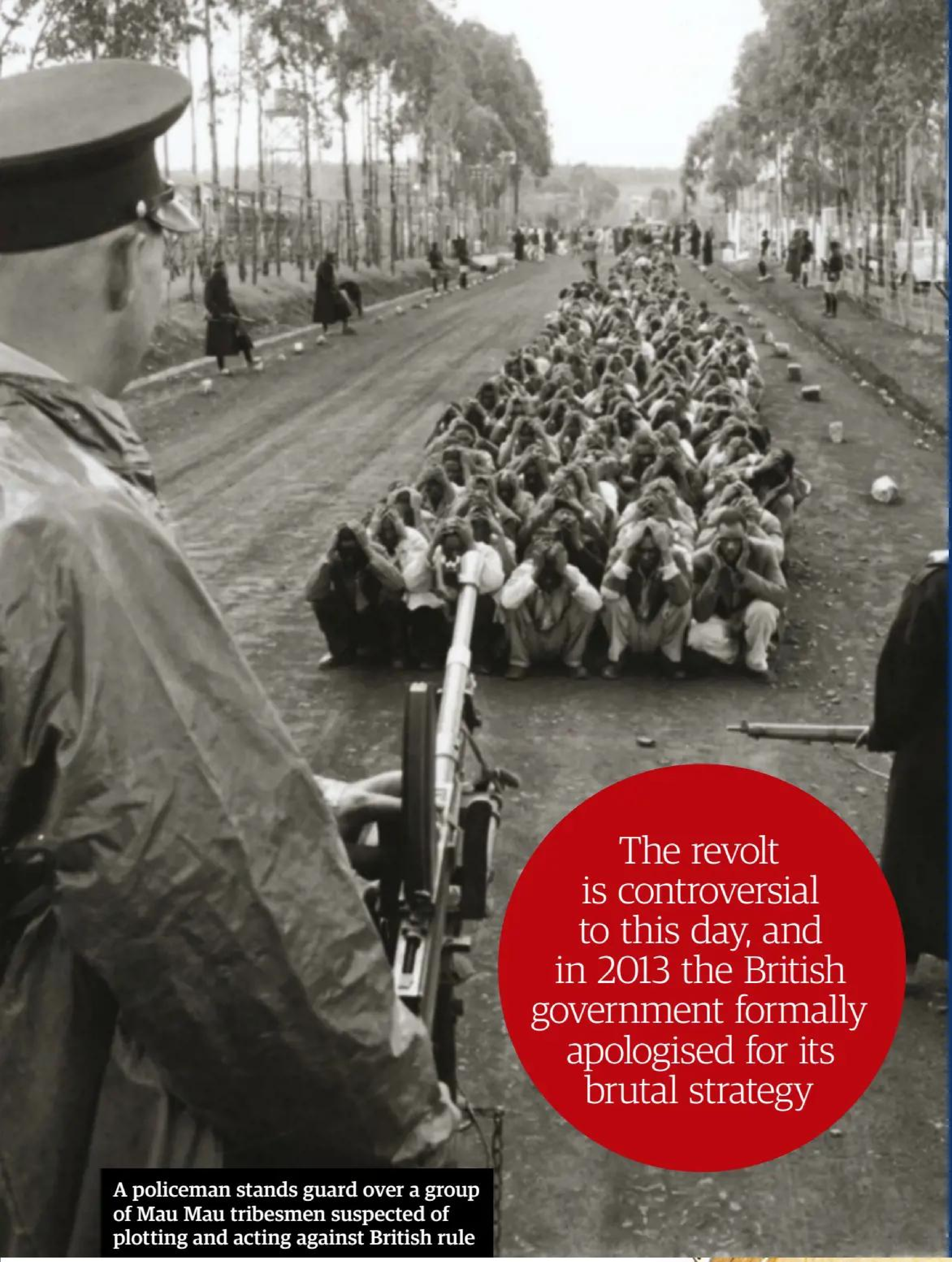
Livingstone

A man who devoted his life to exploring many new countries

David Livingstone was born into working-class Glaswegian life and was taught to read and write by his father. Studying at Anderson's University, he had soon gathered enough funds to move to London. By 1841, his dream of exploration was realised and he was posted to Africa as a missionary doctor. Livingstone was a man of God, and upon reaching the Kalahari Desert region of Africa, he began converting many of the locals to Christianity. As well as his religious values, he learned about the true extent of the horrors of the slave trade and explored Botswana and Lake Ngami.

Livingstone made several trips to Africa and whether on foot, canoe or ox-back, he regularly diced with death from wild animal attacks or disease. Meeting many local tribes, his writings helped advance knowledge of the slave trade and the dangers of malaria and scurvy. Government funding ran out in the late 1850s, but by 1866, the Scot had accumulated enough money of his own to finance another trip. This time, the destination was the source of the River Nile, and it would end up being his final expedition.

With almost no crew left and suffering from pneumonia, the explorer went missing and was only found in October 1871 in Tanzania. Physically exhausted but always dedicated to his job, Livingstone died in May 1873. The British Empire owes him greatly for mapping out vast swathes of the previously uncharted African continent.



A policeman stands guard over a group of Mau Mau tribesmen suspected of plotting and acting against British rule

The revolt is controversial to this day, and in 2013 the British government formally apologised for its brutal strategy

Mau Mau

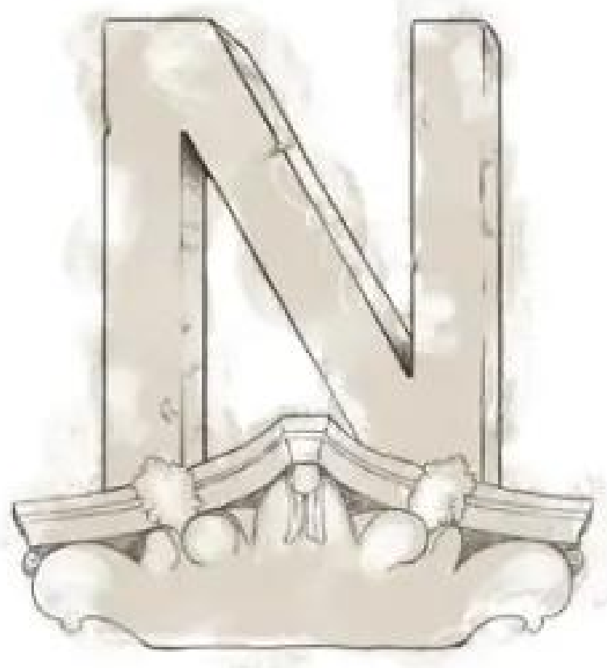
A bloody uprising that shook the foundations of an already failing empire

In the post-World War II world, a wave of nationalism spread over Africa. The rule of the European powers was coming to an end as decolonisation took place. The British Empire was one of the nations to take the brunt of this nationalistic drive, especially in Kenya. Known as the Mau Mau Rebellion, the aim of the revolt was to completely eradicate all forms of British rule in Kenya. The first anti-British secret meetings were held in August 1951 in the capital Nairobi, and the Mau Mau oath was taken by every member. By October 1952, the frequent arson attacks and assassinations carried out by the Mau Mau had finally caught the attention of the British government, who sent troops over immediately. The uprising had escalated.

A state of emergency was declared in Kenya as hostilities continued. 40 people, both white settlers and black non-Mau Mau followers, were murdered in the space of just four weeks as the Mau Mau was officially declared a terrorist organisation. British soldiers responded by arresting thousands of insurgents and cordoning off tribal lands to restrict Mau Mau movement. By 1954, the rebellion was lessening as more leaders were captured and interrogated. An offer of amnesty was tendered by the British, but this was blankly rejected and the killings continued. By 1955 70,000 suspected Mau Mau were imprisoned, slowing the uprising which led to the state of emergency finally ending in 1959. The uprising was a bloody episode that demonstrated the wane of European power in Africa and was a catalyst towards Kenya's independence in 1963.

Nelson

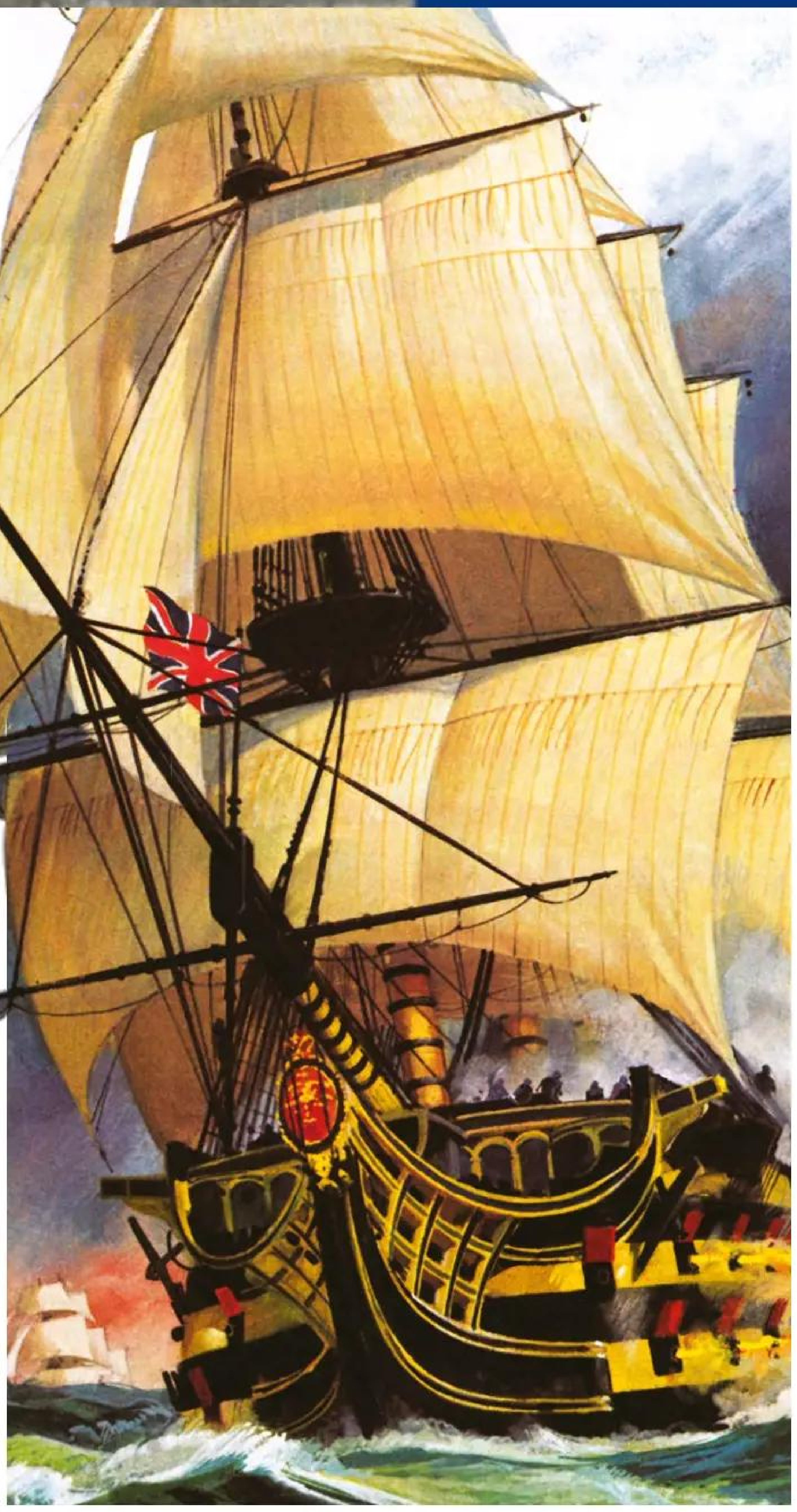
The naval genius that expected every man to



Horatio Nelson was one of the greatest military minds to ever grace the Royal Navy. Raised in Norfolk, he began his navy career at the age of 12 as an apprentice midshipman. The young man's talents shone through and he was fast-tracked through the ranks, making captain in 1779.

Prior to Trafalgar, Nelson served in the Americas and the Caribbean. The Battle of St Vincent in 1797 was one of his earliest victories as the Royal Navy struck a devastating and critical blow to the Spanish. Now revered at home, Nelson once again utilised his genius with a stunning victory over the French at the Battle of the Nile in 1798.

Once an admiral, Nelson found time to defeat a strong force at Copenhagen in 1801. What Nelson will be remembered for, and what the British Empire is forever grateful to him for, however, is Trafalgar. The War of the Third



Opium Wars

Two conflicts that had a lasting effect on the Far East

Opium was big business for the British Empire. A commodity that sold big in China, its trade helped finance the British demand for tea and silk. However, the downside to the business was the nasty effects opium had, with addiction to the drug becoming a problem. When the Chinese government realised what was happening to their people, they imposed restrictions on the trade, denting British profits. The result was war.

The first war began after the Chinese destroyed 20,000 chests of opium. To support their interests the British government sent an expeditionary force to occupy the city of Canton in May 1841, and the capture of Nanking in August ended the war with a British victory. The second war was larger in scale as the French waded into the conflict. Military operations began in late 1856 and by 1858 British gunboat diplomacy had forced the Chinese into negotiations. A number of treaties legalised the importation of opium once again but hostilities resumed when the Chinese shelled the British in June 1859. Angered, the British and French returned with a huge force in August 1860 and captured Beijing, ending the war once and for all.

Penal colonies

The empire had many prisoners that all needed to be locked up

Perhaps one of the most efficient uses of America for the British Empire was its role as a huge prison. An estimated 50,000 of the empire's convicts were sent to the New World, making up one-quarter of all British settlers during the 1700s. The first convicts were sent over in 1718 under the government's new Transportation Act, which introduced mass penal transportation to what are now the states of Virginia and Maryland. When the 13 colonies were lost after the American Revolution, Britain needed to create more penal colonies to lock away its criminals. Initially, many of the convicts were held upon ships (prison hulks) on the River Thames and forced to clean the river, but this was not a long-term solution. In 1786, an answer was found, and penal colonies were set up in Australia, the Caribbean, India and Singapore.

The British Empire was by no means the only empire to utilise penal colonies, but it did oversee some of the most extensive. The theory was that criminals could provide cheap labour on plantations and workhouses while being totally disconnected from the rest of the populace. It all changed in 1779 as the Penitentiary Act authorised the opening of state prisons that aimed at ending corruption in jails. The introduction of penal colonies was an ambitious project but eased the pressure on the empire and was a sustainable solution to Britain's huge amount of convicts.

Queen Victoria

The long-standing queen who was famous for being not amused

Queen Victoria ruled Britain in an era of prosperity and relative peace. Her rule coincided with a long period named 'Pax Britannica', where Britain became the leading empire of the world. Victoria married her German cousin Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha in 1840 and the couple went on to reign over an immensely popular monarchy. The Victorian age is remembered for industrial expansion and economic progress, but also development in the arts and science, such as the Great Exhibition of 1851. Britain functioned as a constitutional monarchy with the queen occasionally having an input in politics.

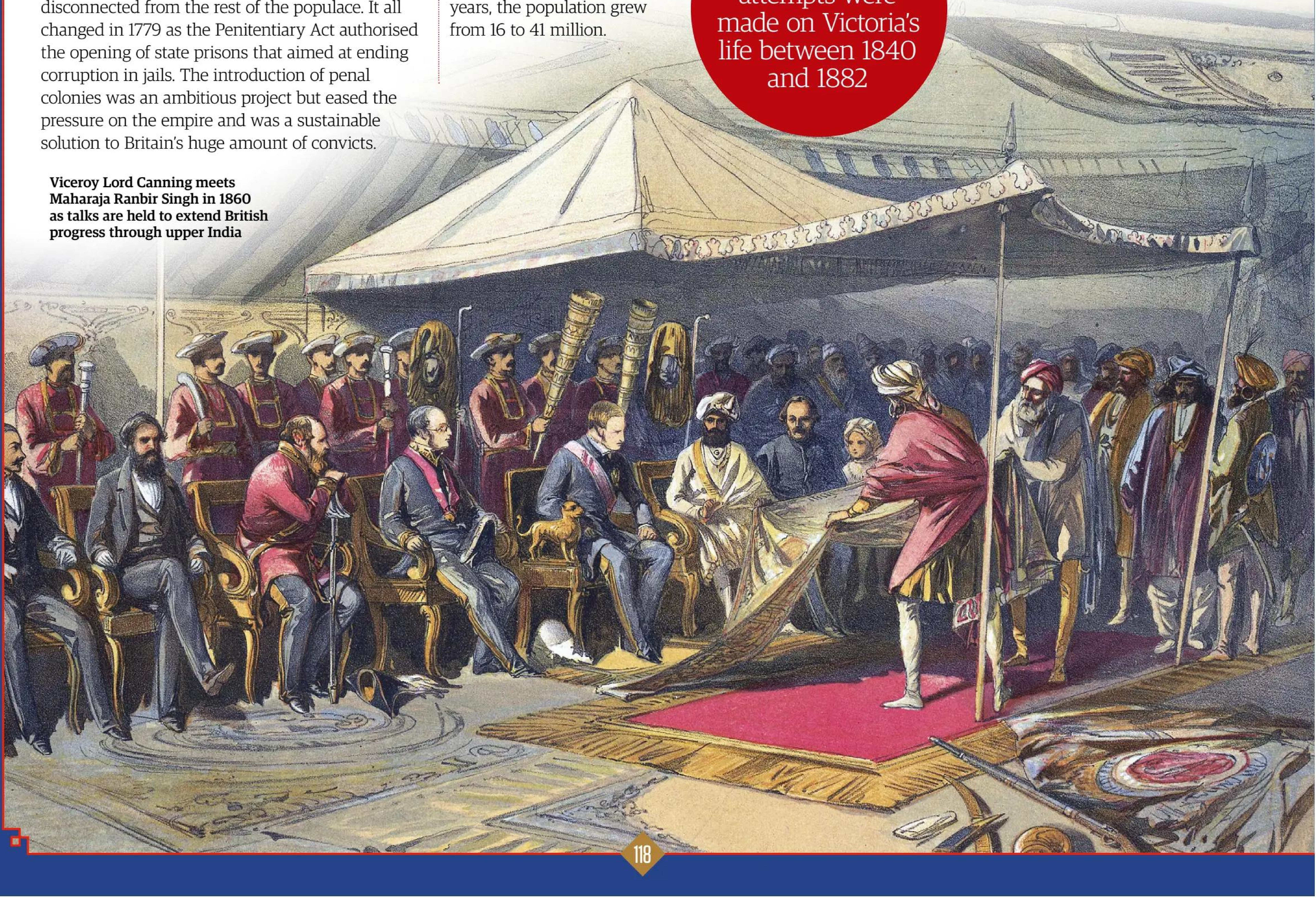
Conflict broke out in 1854 in the form of the Crimean War, which saw the first awarding of the Victoria Cross in 1856, a medal that would become the pinnacle of military achievement in Britain. Domestically, Britain advanced rapidly with the industrial revolution in full flow. In 100 years, the population grew from 16 to 41 million.

Seven assassination attempts were made on Victoria's life between 1840 and 1882

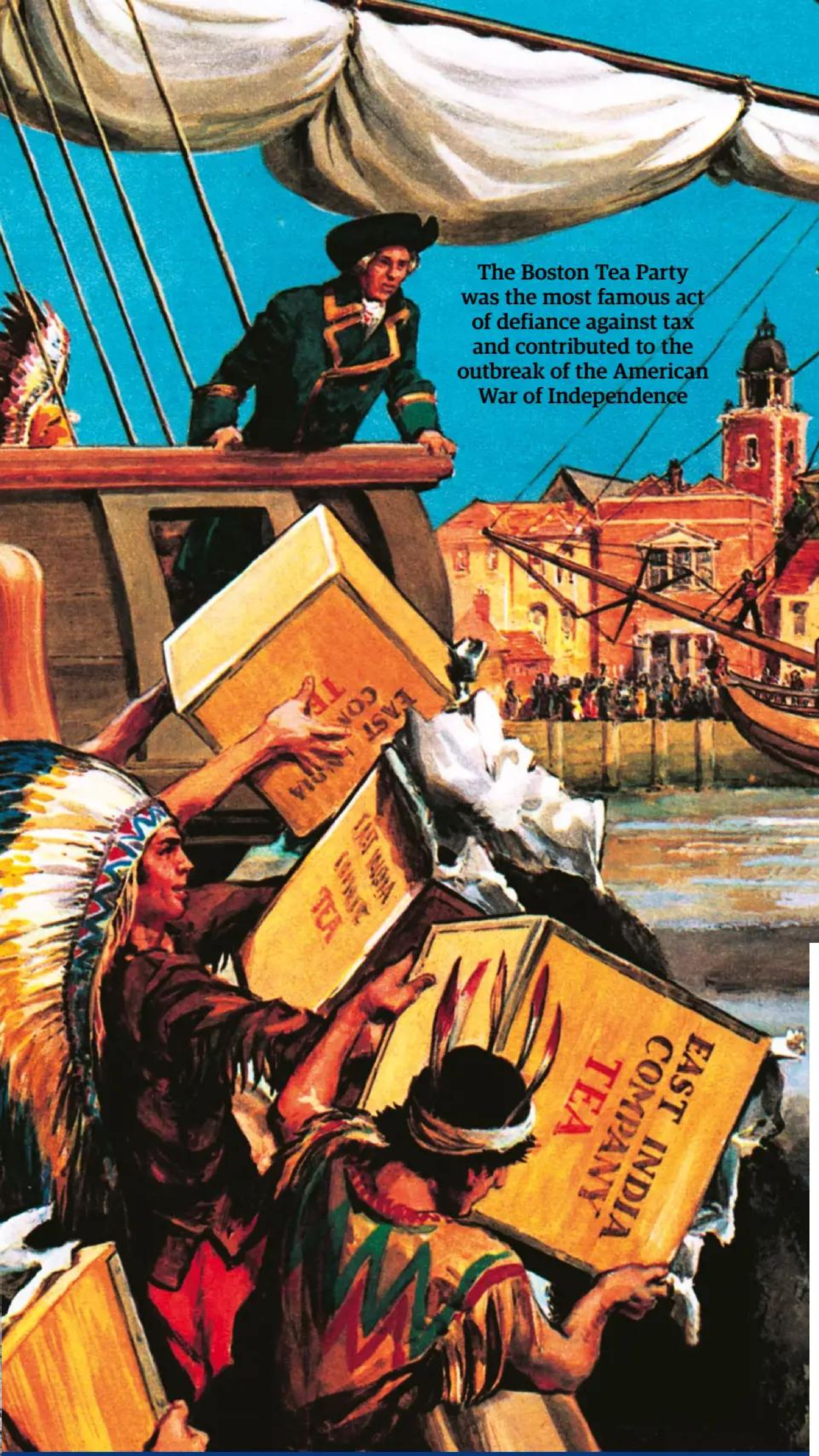
Raj

The successor to company rule, the Raj was a new era for India

In 1858, the faltering East India Company was relieved of its political duties after the Indian Rebellion and British India came into the hands of the British Crown. The Raj didn't cover the whole of India and instead ruled over approximately two-fifths of the subcontinent. A succession of British viceroys ruled India, as the area remained an economic and military asset to Britain. 20 per cent of Britain's exports went to India and many Indians were assumed into the British Army. 20,000 troops and officials ruled over 300 million Indians. Eventually the local population began to resent British rule, as it often left them poor and unfed with empire profits and ambition put first. The Indian National Congress was formed in 1885, giving the natives an intellectual and centralised voice. The organisation also helped aid the rise of Mahatma Gandhi in the early 20th century and get the nation on the road to independence, which was eventually achieved in 1947.



Viceroy Lord Canning meets Maharaja Ranbir Singh in 1860 as talks are held to extend British progress through upper India



The Boston Tea Party was the most famous act of defiance against tax and contributed to the outbreak of the American War of Independence

Slavery

A shameful blot on the empire's legacy

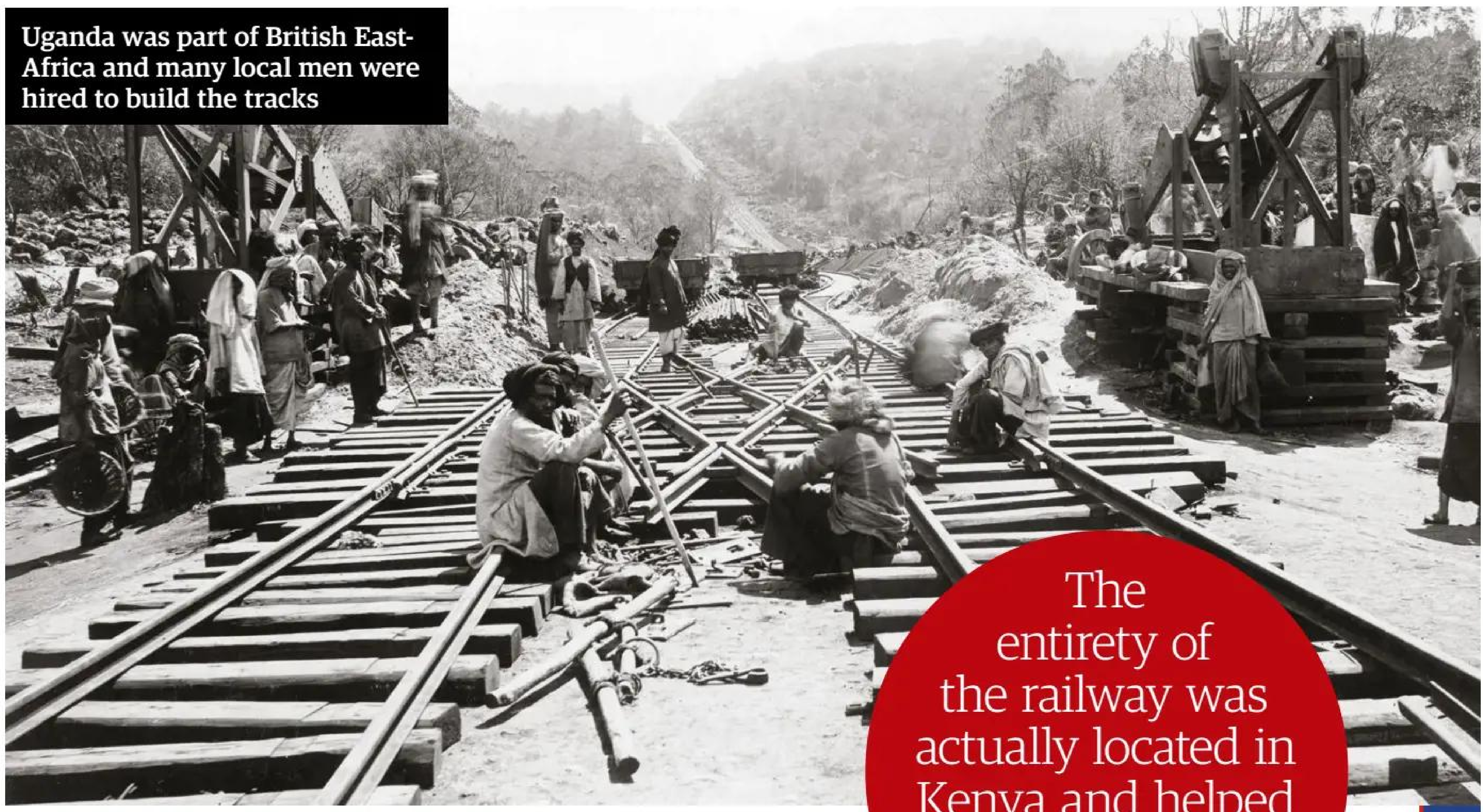
With the empire ever expanding, shortages of labour in British territories were common. To remedy this, Britain (along with many other European powers) decided upon a terrible solution: the slave trade. The first trip was undertaken by John Hawkins in 1562 and the transatlantic slave trade was born. A triangle between Europe, the Americas and Africa, millions of Africans were removed from their homes and forced to work on plantations in the New World. This free workforce greatly benefited the economies of the European powers. In 1807, the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act was passed, finally bringing an end to the vile practice, but it continued in some colonies until 1838. Up until the 20th century, a Royal Navy fleet of ships known as the West Africa Squadron scoured Africa's coast, freeing all the slaves they could as attitudes changed.

Tea

The drink that became a major commodity in the empire

One of the finest results of Britain's expansion into Asia was the tea trade. Primarily a drink for the wealthy due to its high price, the first order was taken in 1664. Tea leaves soon became big business and the East India Company quickly stepped up tea production, especially in Assam, India. Hiring cheap tea-picking labourers, it became a profitable industry and a cultural phenomenon back in Britain, rivalling coffee for the nation's favourite drink. Each crossing from China or India to Britain would take months and taxation on tea was very high, which often resulted in tax avoidance through smuggling. After the demise of the East India Company, the tea trade became a free-for-all and merchants chartered fast ships known as clippers to get a piece of the action. Since it was first traded, it has undoubtedly become the drink of Britain and the drink of empire.

Right: Tea bags weren't invented yet, so the precious tea leaves were transported back to Britain in wooden chests known as caddies



Uganda was part of British East-Africa and many local men were hired to build the tracks

The entirety of the railway was actually located in Kenya and helped build up the city of Nairobi

Uganda Railway

The 'Lunatic Express' that blazed a trail through both Uganda and Kenya

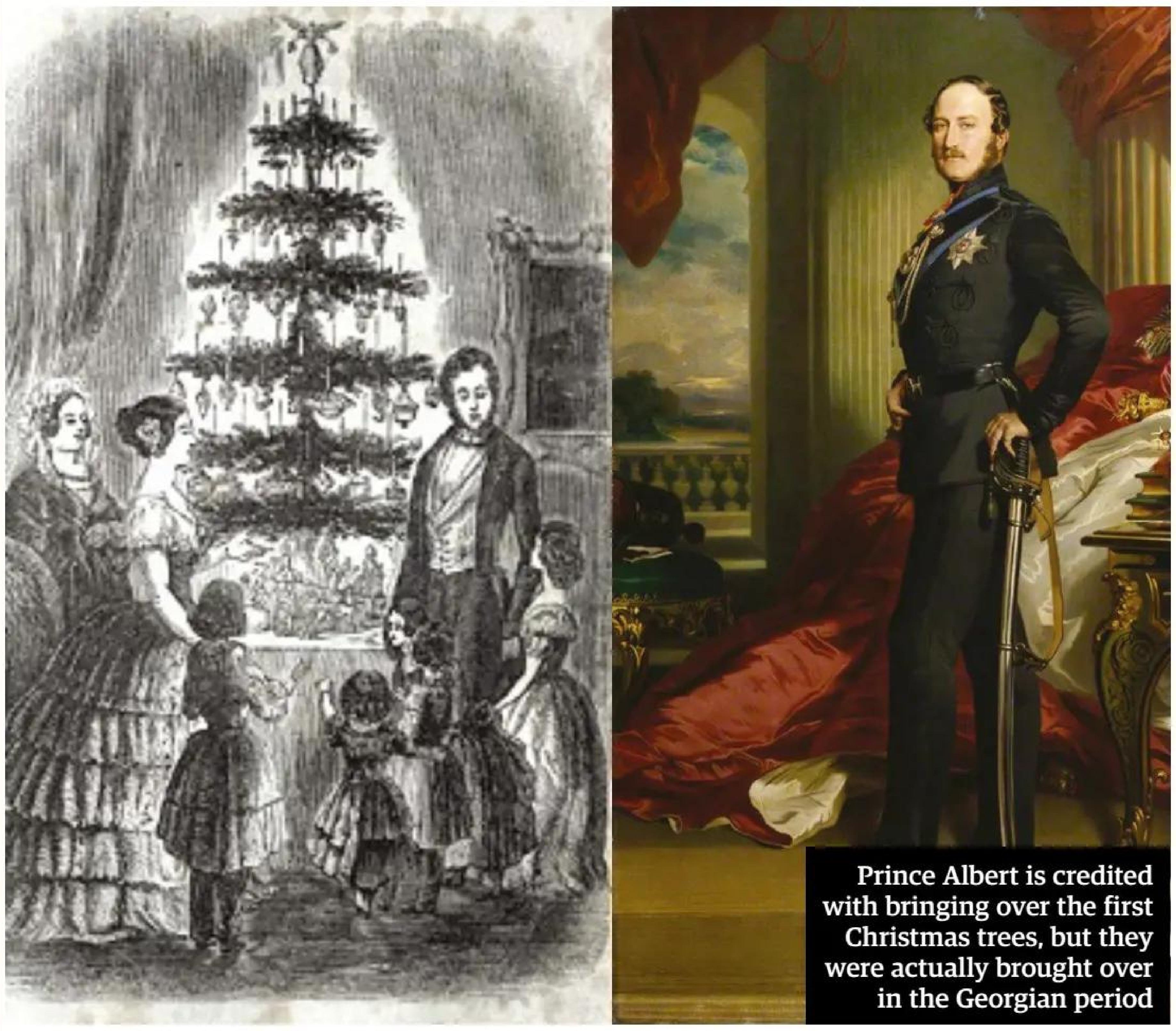
1,062 kilometres of track, the Ugandan railway began its life on 30 May 1896 when the first plate was laid. The first train would leave Mombasa station two years later. The track was the brainchild of George Whitehouse, a veteran of railway construction in England, South Africa and India. Many of the first engines to hit the tracks were second-hand imports from India. 31,983 Indians were sent to Africa to construct the railroad along with a few thousand East Africans. The conditions were harsh for the workers and they would sometimes go for days without water due to late or derailed water trains. The most dangerous part of the job, however, was the so-called 'man-eaters of Tsavo'. When the railway was being constructed over the Tsavo River, the workers were preyed upon by a number of lions that killed about 20 men.

There were many perils along the way, but the railway was finally completed in 1901. The Lunatic Express helped the British prevent German influence in the area and was an effective political move to control the Nile and access to the east African coast. The railway wasn't popular with the natives and was known as the 'Iron Snake'. The Kedong Massacre of 1895 resulted in 500 deaths after a worker's caravan was attacked by the Maasai people who were incensed after two girls were allegedly raped. Parts of the track are open today and have been incorporated

Vimy Ridge

A defining moment for Canadian troops fighting on the side of the empire in World War I

Vimy Ridge was the Word War I battle in which the bravery and effectiveness of Canadian soldiers came to the fore. The troops were ordered to seize the heavily defended ridge, which had a commanding view over the British lines and was strategically important for the Central Powers. A French attack had already failed, so the assault was carefully prepared. The plan of attack was an artillery barrage that would keep the Germans pinned down while the Canadians charged through subterranean tunnels towards enemy lines. The battle began at 5.30am on 9 April with the thunder of 1,000 artillery pieces as 15,000 Canadian infantrymen stormed the German trenches while under heavy machine-gun fire. By the end of the day, 10,000 were killed or wounded, but Hill 145, the highest point of the ridge, was successfully captured by a bayonet charge on the final machine-gun nests. A monument now stands at this spot to commemorate the immense acts of courage and sacrifice.



Prince Albert is credited with bringing over the first Christmas trees, but they were actually brought over in the Georgian period

Xmas Tree

The invasion of evergreens into British households

They may be a staple of Christmas tradition now, but prior to the Victorian age, Christmas trees, as we know them today, were a rarity. The first trees were brought over to Britain in 1800 by George III's German wife Queen Charlotte, but they only achieved any sort of popularity in the 1840s thanks to Queen Victoria's German husband, Prince Albert.

Their popularity only rose further when the royal family were pictured with their own tree, and companies first got in on the Christmas act in 1880 when Woolworths began selling Christmas tree ornaments. Originally, the German Springelbaum was the tree of choice, but they began to be replaced by the Norwegian spruce as demand grew in the 1880s. By the end of the 19th century, Christmas in the British Empire had transformed from a barely recognised date to a national holiday.

The loss of life was high but the victory at Vimy Ridge was the single most successful advance by the Triple Entente up to that date

Westminster system

How legislation and governance made its way from Britain to the outer reaches of the empire

The loss of the USA resulted in a political rejig in the empire. The Durham Report, written in 1839, has been described as "the book that saved the empire" and put forward the idea of colonies governing themselves. Britain ruled one-fifth of the world's population at its peak, and as time progressed it couldn't keep all the political institutions of its sprawling empire in check. A two-party system evolved in many of the British dominions with Canada allowed a responsible government in 1848 and Australia in 1855. The system benefited Britain as it reduced the pressure on its parliament to make decisions for all the lands it governed but still gave it supreme rule over the colonies. It benefited the colonies as it gave them the ability to rule with a sense of independence and freedom.

Most colonies took on what is known as the 'Westminster system'. For many of these countries today, the political system is a final remnant of British rule and, with some adaptation, has served their politics well. For example, India, despite huge rebellions and a successful drive for independence, still utilises the system. It has, however, become unpopular in some former colonies. Riots in the Solomon Islands in 2006 were motivated by the April 2006 election and many have criticised the Westminster system as it can fail to reflect who the electorate vote for with its first-past-the-post system.

The Westminster system helped maintain a Commonwealth even after decolonisation

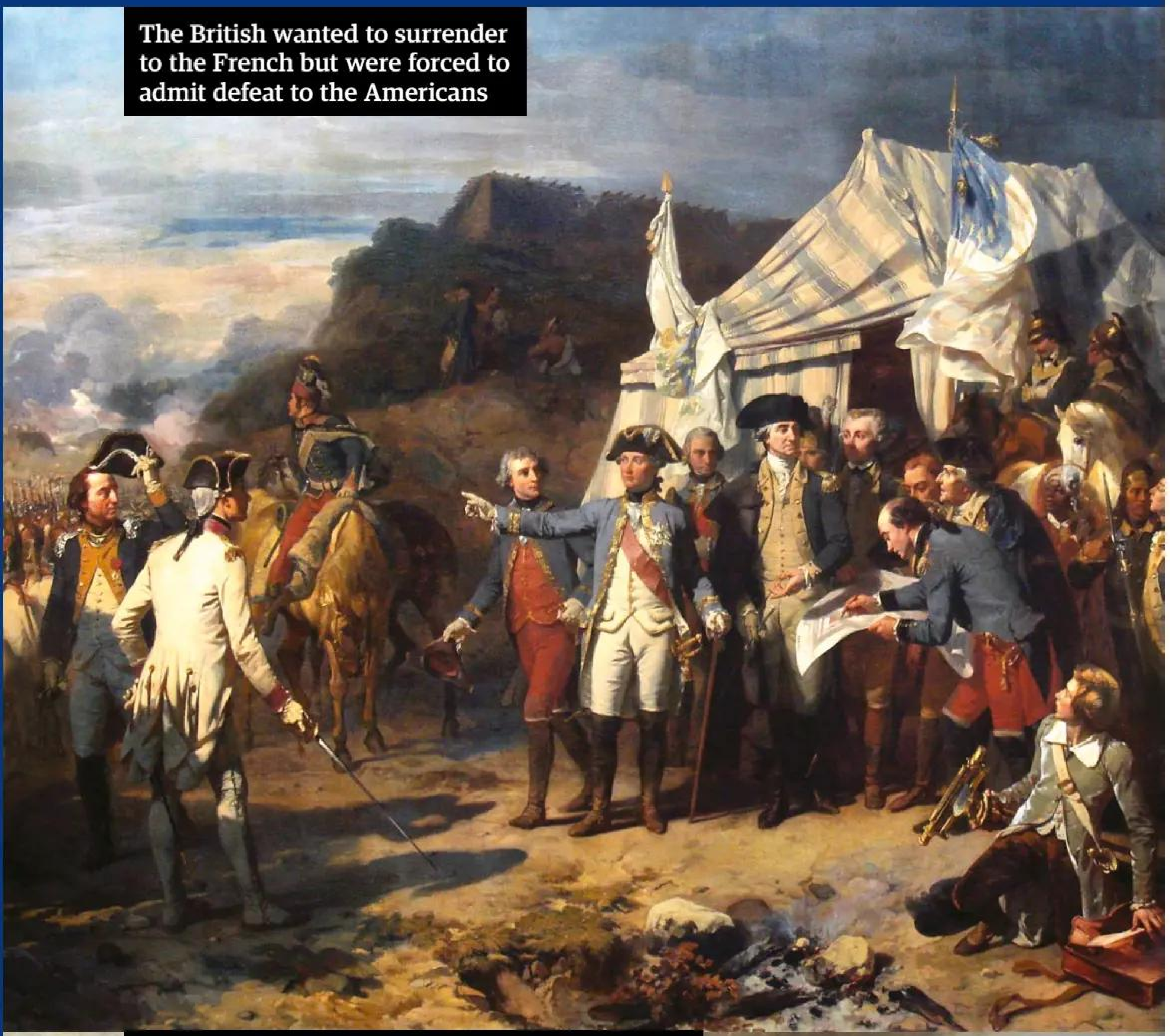
Yorktown

The important siege that brought an end to major hostilities in the American War of Independence

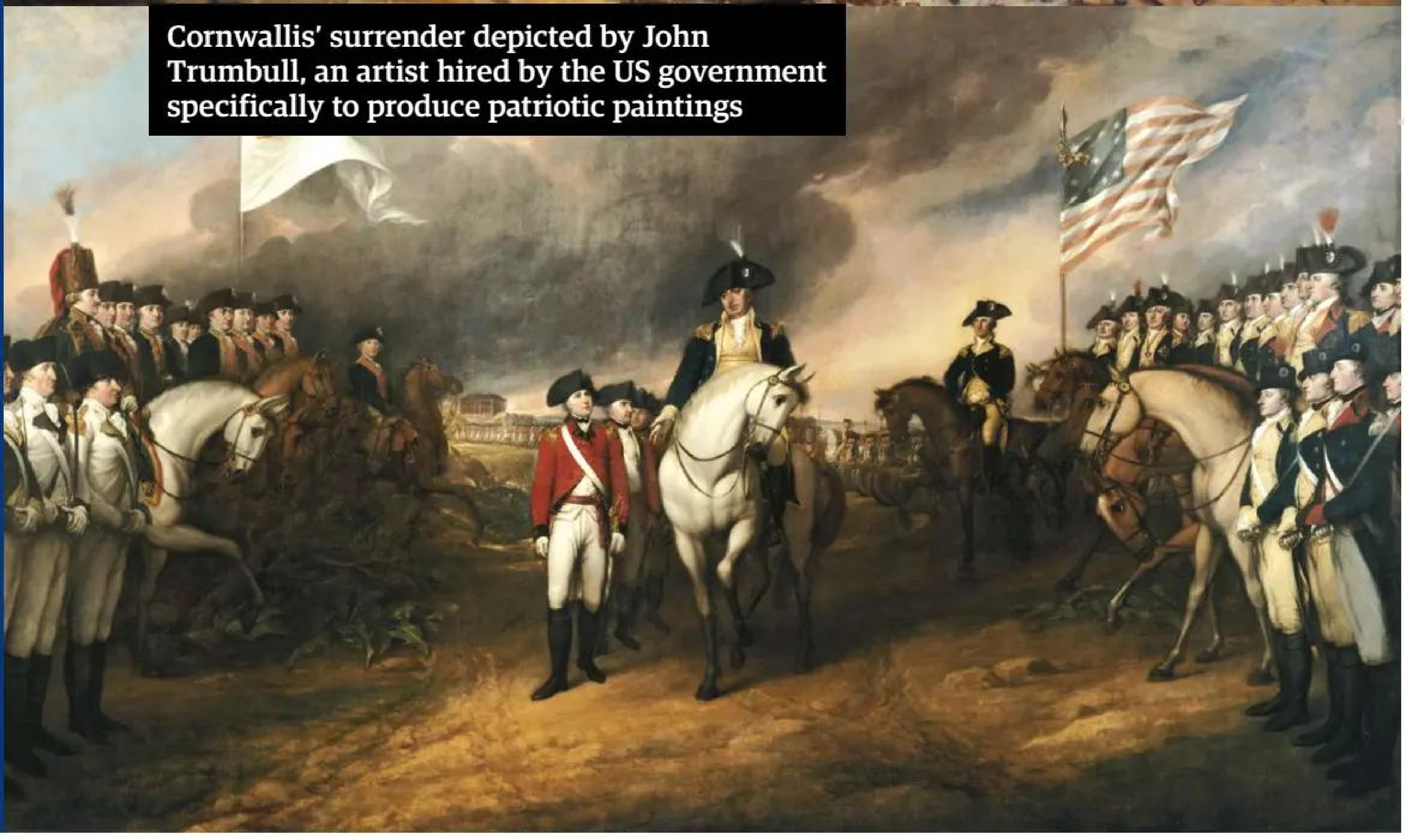
Perhaps one of the most pivotal battles in the history of empire, Yorktown signified the end of the British grip on America.

The British commander, Lord Cornwallis, had moved his troops to Yorktown, Virginia, in hope of maintaining communication with the main British Army in New York. George Washington ordered French general Lafayette and an American and French coalition army to prevent Cornwallis' escape from Yorktown. A sea blockade was put in place and shortly after land troops advanced on the British.

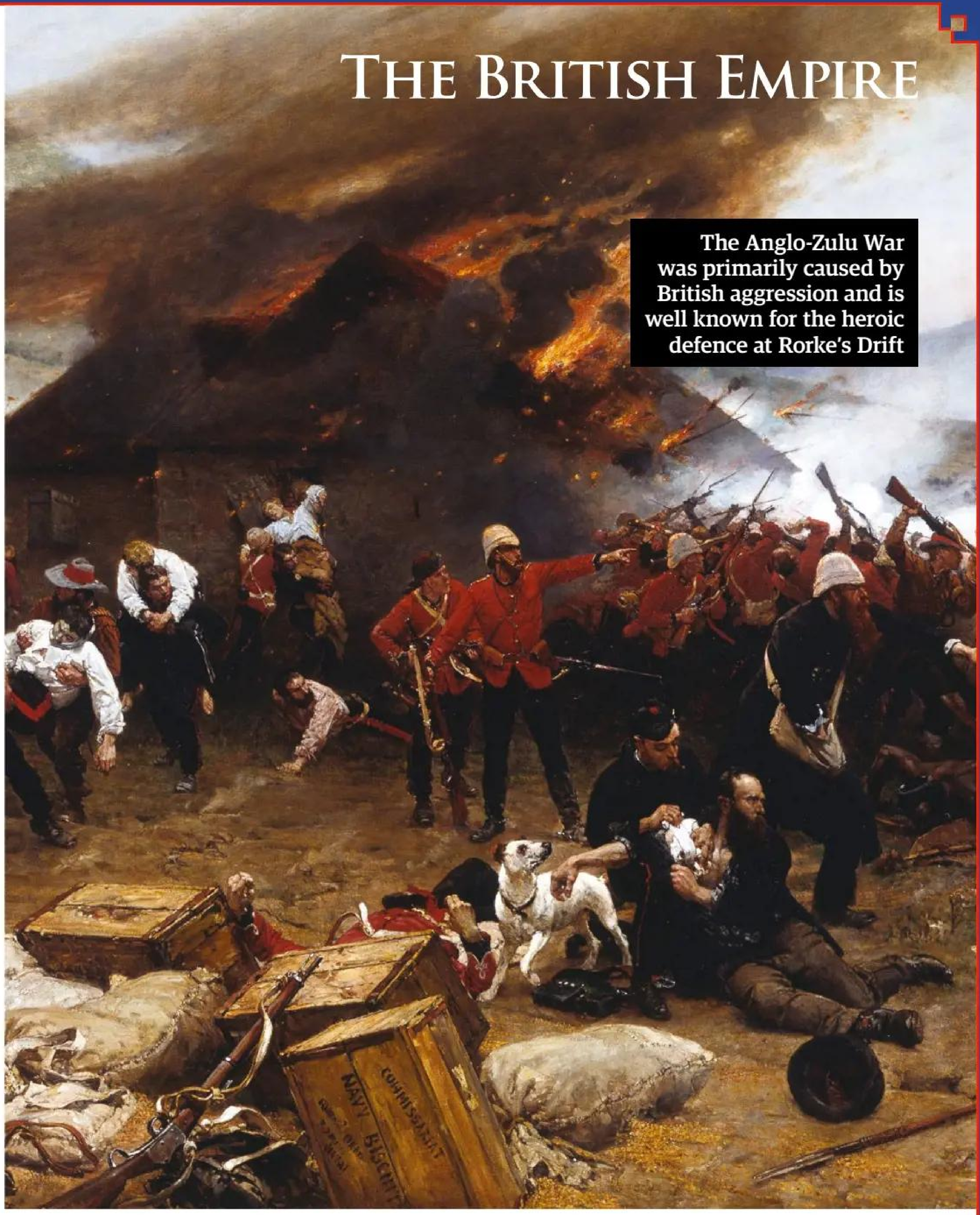
After the British lost naval superiority at the Battle of the Chesapeake, Cornwallis and his men were isolated. After 20 days, the situation was hopeless and Yorktown was surrendered with 8,000 British prisoners taken. The defeat itself wasn't a huge loss, but it started to persuade the British government to consider peace.



The British wanted to surrender to the French but were forced to admit defeat to the Americans



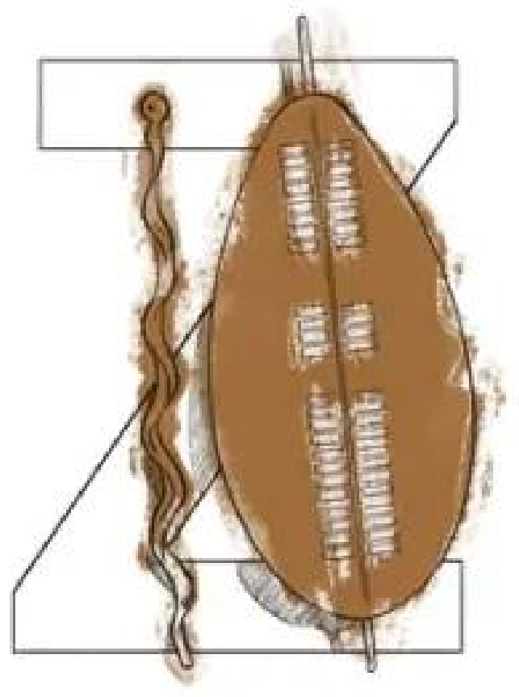
Cornwallis' surrender depicted by John Trumbull, an artist hired by the US government specifically to produce patriotic paintings



The Anglo-Zulu War was primarily caused by British aggression and is well known for the heroic defence at Rorke's Drift

Zulu

Prior to the Boer War, the British found another great threat to their desire to rule southern Africa



In the early years of the 19th century, the Zulus were the major holders of power in southern Africa. However, with settlers arriving from overseas, it wasn't long until violence broke out between them and the new Boer and British colonists who had discovered gold and diamonds in Zulu lands. Back in London, the British government wasn't keen on war, but High Commissioner for South Africa Bartle Frere had other ideas; he issued an ultimatum to the Zulus. The harsh conditions imposed were not adhered to and predictably led to war.

The Anglo-Zulu War began in January 1879. The Zulus had a numerical advantage with King Cetawayo boasting forces of 40,000. The first major conflict was at Isandlwana, where 806 British soldiers died in what became an emphatic victory for the Zulus. The same day, a small British encampment called Rorke's Drift was assaulted by huge numbers of Zulus, but the garrison of just 145 men remarkably held out.

As the war progressed, the tide turned against the Zulus, who were no match for British tactics and firepower. A telling example of this came at Kambula in March 1879, when 2,000 Zulus perished while the British only lost a total of 18 men. This defeat broke the Zulu nation and effectively handed their lands over to the British.

British imperialism had conquered South Africa and the area would become an important part of empire until war broke out again 1880, this time against the Boers.

> The disastrous and embarrassing loss at Isandlwana was covered up; many of the Victorian public never heard the true story

THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

Although it lasted less than two centuries, the Russian Empire became a dominant power on the world stage and grew to encompass one-sixth of the landmass of the globe within its boundaries

Written by Greg King

The Russian Empire existed for just under two centuries – a short span of life as empires go. Yet from its foundation in 1721 to its end in 1917, it managed, through invasions, wars and treaties, to more than double its size, growing from a backward, isolated country to one rivalled only by the British Empire in its area and international reach.

Most empires were shaped not merely by monarchs but by generals and diplomats as well, subject to the influence of the Church, the dictates of parliaments and the tide of public opinion. Russia was different. The ruling Romanov dynasty claimed a divine mandate to rule. As autocrats they stood alone, unencumbered by the interference of legislatures or the constraints of constitutions. The empire's greatness was the greatness of the Romanovs; ergo its failures fell squarely on the ruling sovereign.

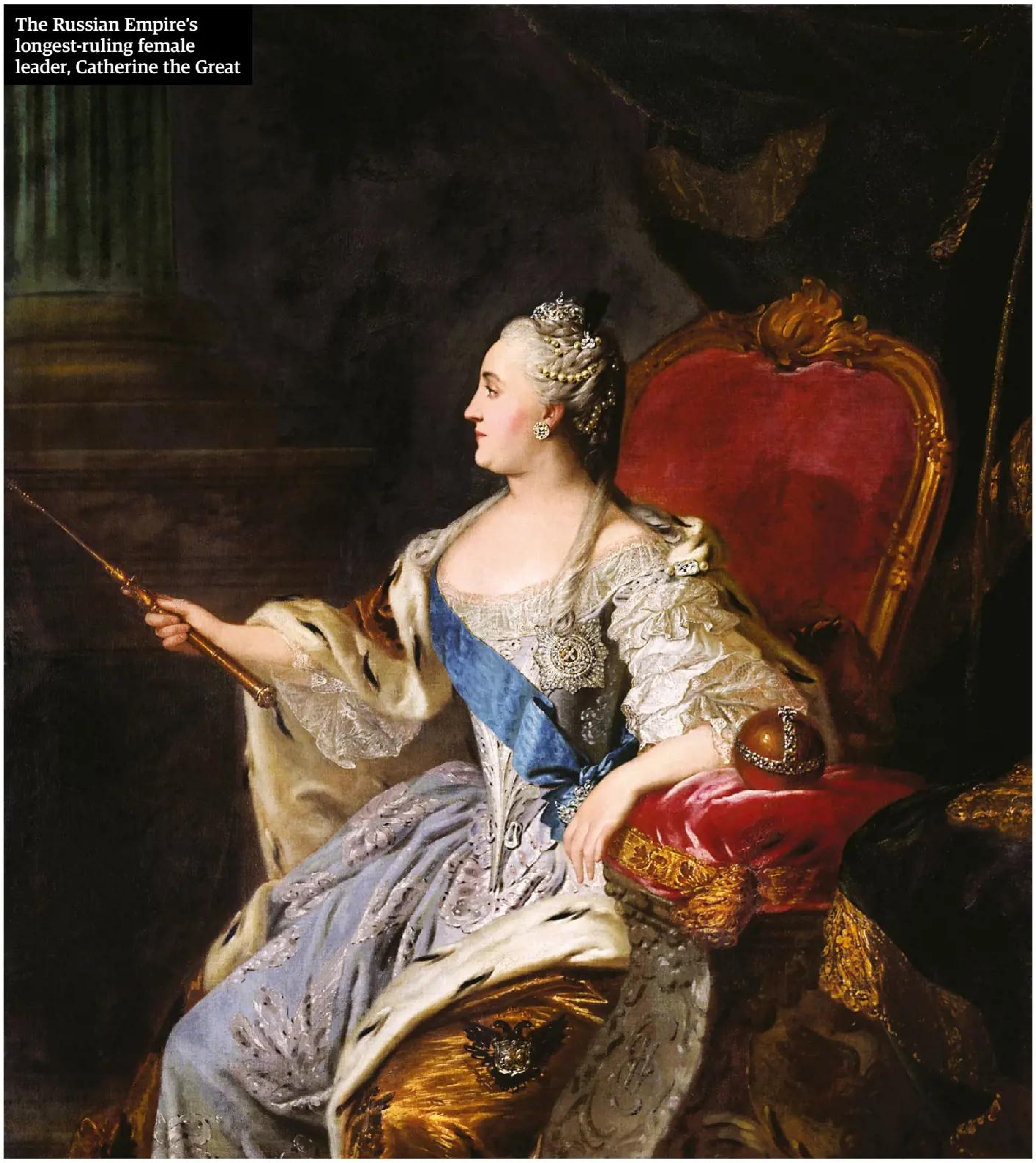
Before Peter the Great, the country was vast but isolated, wrapped in a kind of Medieval gloom even as the Renaissance and the Reformation swept Europe. In 1613, a group of nobles elected a 16-year-old boy, Michael Romanov, as tsar; his grandson Peter the Great transformed the country into an empire. After coming to the throne in 1682, Peter spent the next four decades fighting wars to win Russia a place on the world stage. The country had no navy or even a merchant fleet. Peter founded both, then launched military campaigns to win territory and access to international waters.

The struggle over northern Baltic territories held by Sweden dominated two decades of Russian life. In the early days, the Great Northern War was an exercise in humiliation: victories fell to the Swedes, who were better trained and armed than their Russian counterparts. But in 1709, the Swedes suffered a humiliating defeat at Poltava in the Ukraine. It took another 12 years for Russia to completely triumph. The victory, when it came, was magnificent: Russia gained much of Finland as well as modern-day Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and with them unrestricted access to the Baltic Sea.

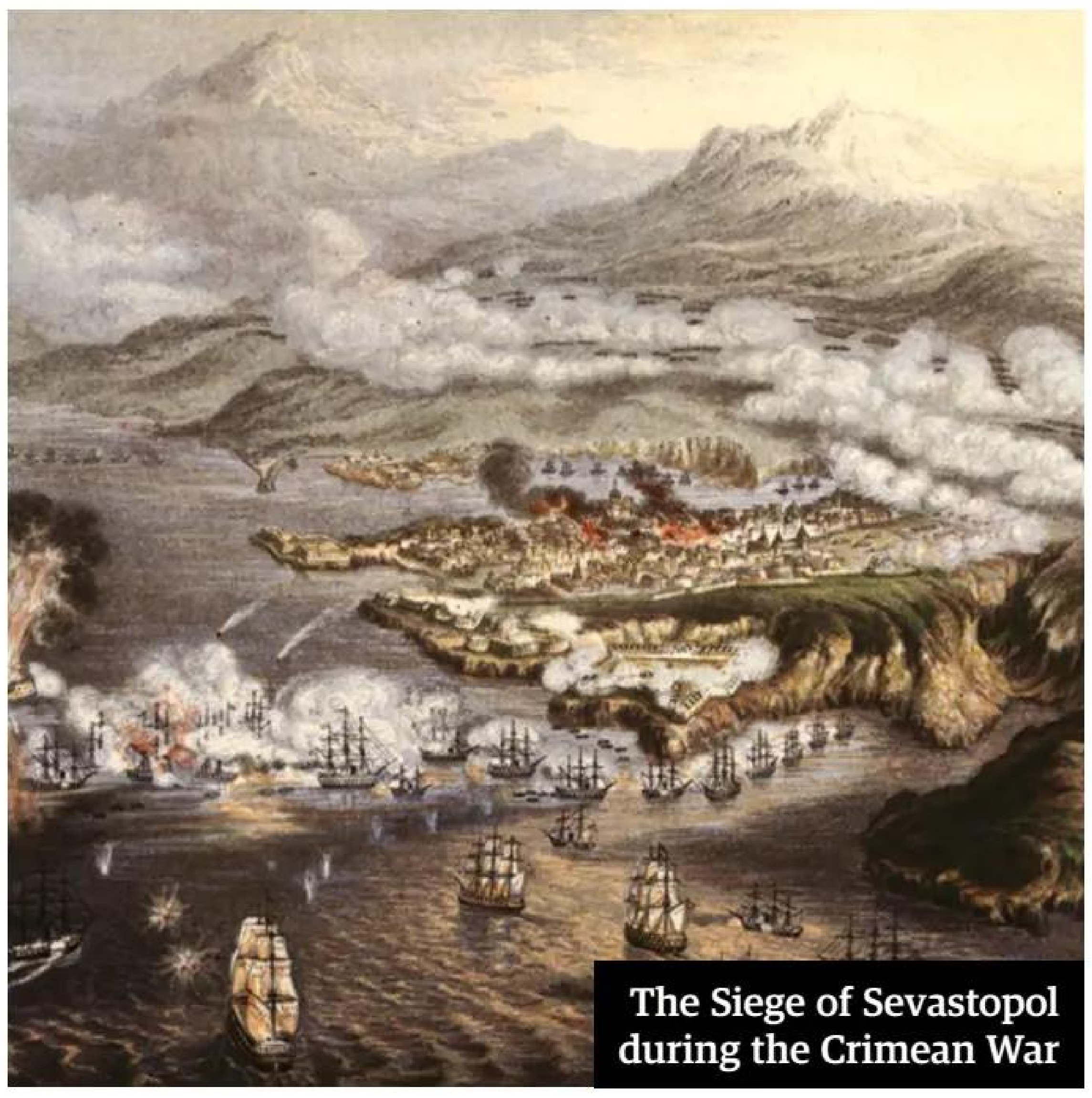
It was to celebrate this victory that, in October 1721, Peter declared Russia an empire, swapping out the Muscovite title of tsar for emperor. He filled his new capital, Saint Petersburg, with buildings and palaces designed by German and Italian architects, imposed the veneer of European polish on a still barbaric court, and dragged the reluctant country out of its Medieval past toward the 18th century. There were reforms great and small: Peter made the Russian Orthodox Church subservient to the throne, established a government bureaucracy, and even ordered that aristocrats don French clothing and shave their beards to emulate their sophisticated European counterparts.

Yet the new empire was a backward land. Of its 15 million subjects, 96 per cent were illiterate peasants who lived and laboured in extreme poverty. Education was denied and rights were nonexistent. Even worse was the fate of Russia's serfs, the millions without possessions who laboured on aristocratic estates and could be bought and sold like cattle. Even as issues of peasant rights and slavery began to consume European thought, Russia resisted any changes.

In the decades following Peter's death, the empire continued its expansion. The southwestern part of Sweden fell to Russian invasion in 1743, and the Russian-American Company not only took Alaska, but also extended its influence down the West Coast as far as modern California. This growth, though, came at a cost: nearly half of the annual



The Russian Empire's longest-ruling female leader, Catherine the Great



The Siege of Sevastopol during the Crimean War

“The empress was politically astute and considered herself an enlightened ruler”

state budget went to the military. With little income from economic trade, Russia borrowed money from Europe at exorbitant rates; this left the empire in a state of perpetual debt, and heavy taxation fell on those least able to afford it. In the countryside poverty grew, even as the Romanovs and their courtiers lived increasingly extravagant lives in distant Saint Petersburg.

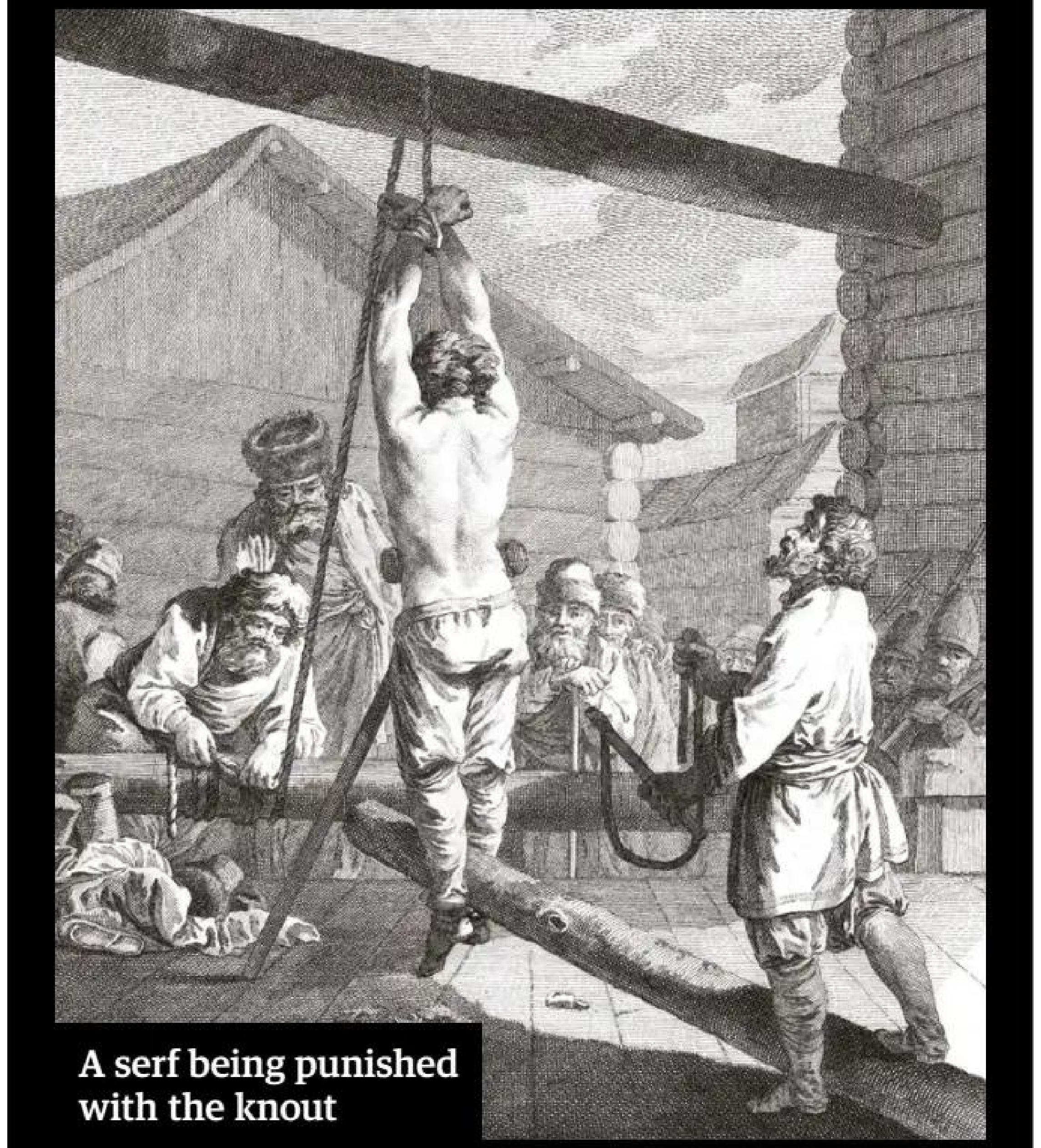
It wasn't until 1762 that the situation took a dramatic turn, when a former German princess took the throne in a coup and became Catherine the Great. Catherine presided over the greatest expansion the empire had ever witnessed. In 1772, her armies gained control over much of the former Polish Kingdom; in 1783, after a successful war against the Ottoman Empire, Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula, and a decade later the country added most of the Belorussian and Ukrainian territories. In all, Catherine's soldiers conquered fully a quarter of Europe. By the time of her death in 1796, Russia had grown into a major European power, one both respected and feared.

The empress was politically astute and considered herself an enlightened ruler. Tentative steps allowed provinces a limited say in local administration, and a court system provided uniform justice, though only for members of the aristocracy and merchant class.

The empire continued its embrace of European culture with Neoclassical palaces and the adoption of French as the official language of the court. But Enlightenment only went so far. Catherine clung ferociously to the autocracy, especially after the French Revolution, which she considered a slight against all monarchs. To ensure their continued loyalty, Catherine granted new privileges to the aristocracy at the expense of their serfs, handing out these unnamed labourers to her various lovers.

PEASANT LIFE

Serfdom in Russia was a lingering black mark against the empire as it aspired to become a world power

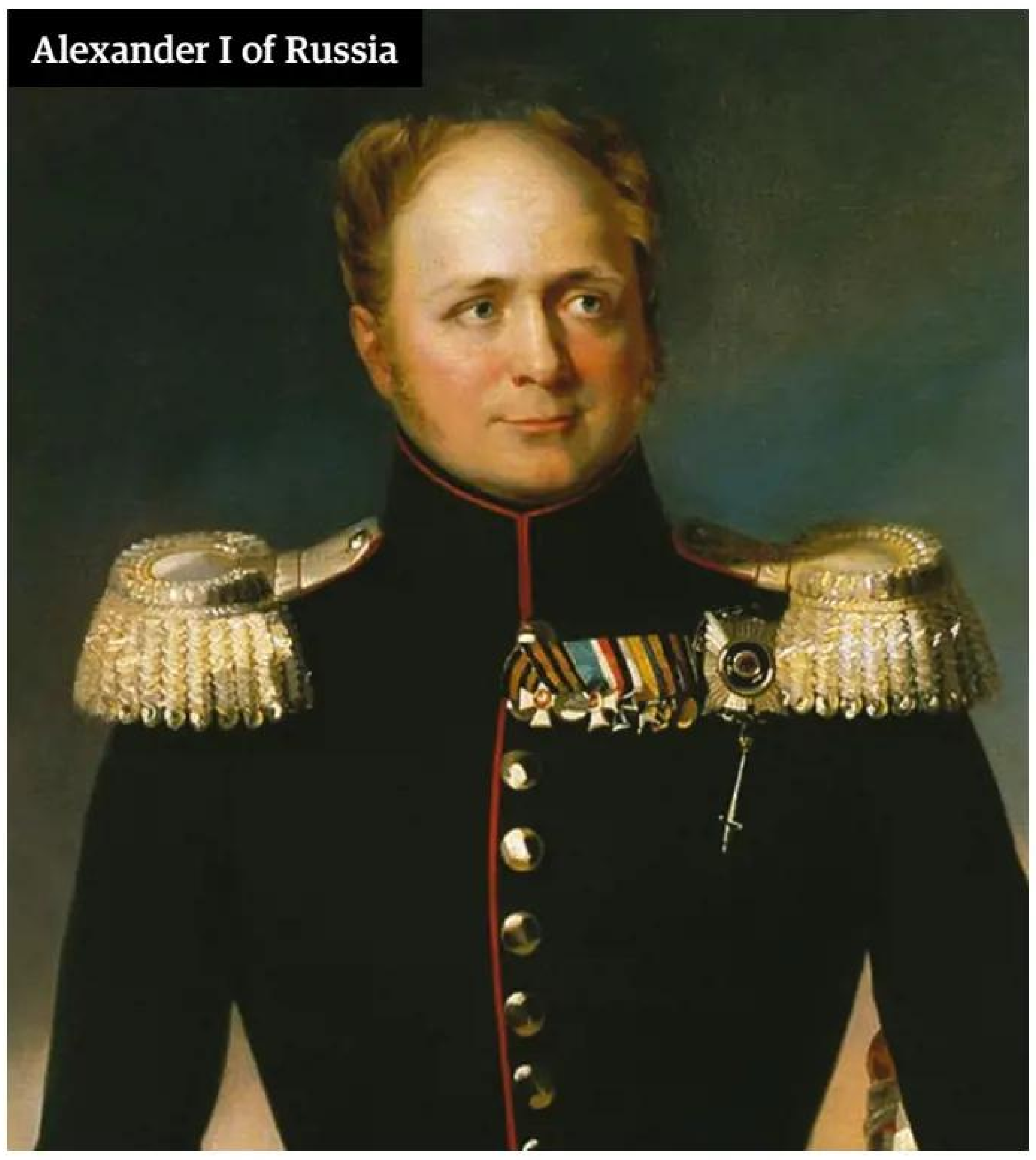


A serf being punished with the knout

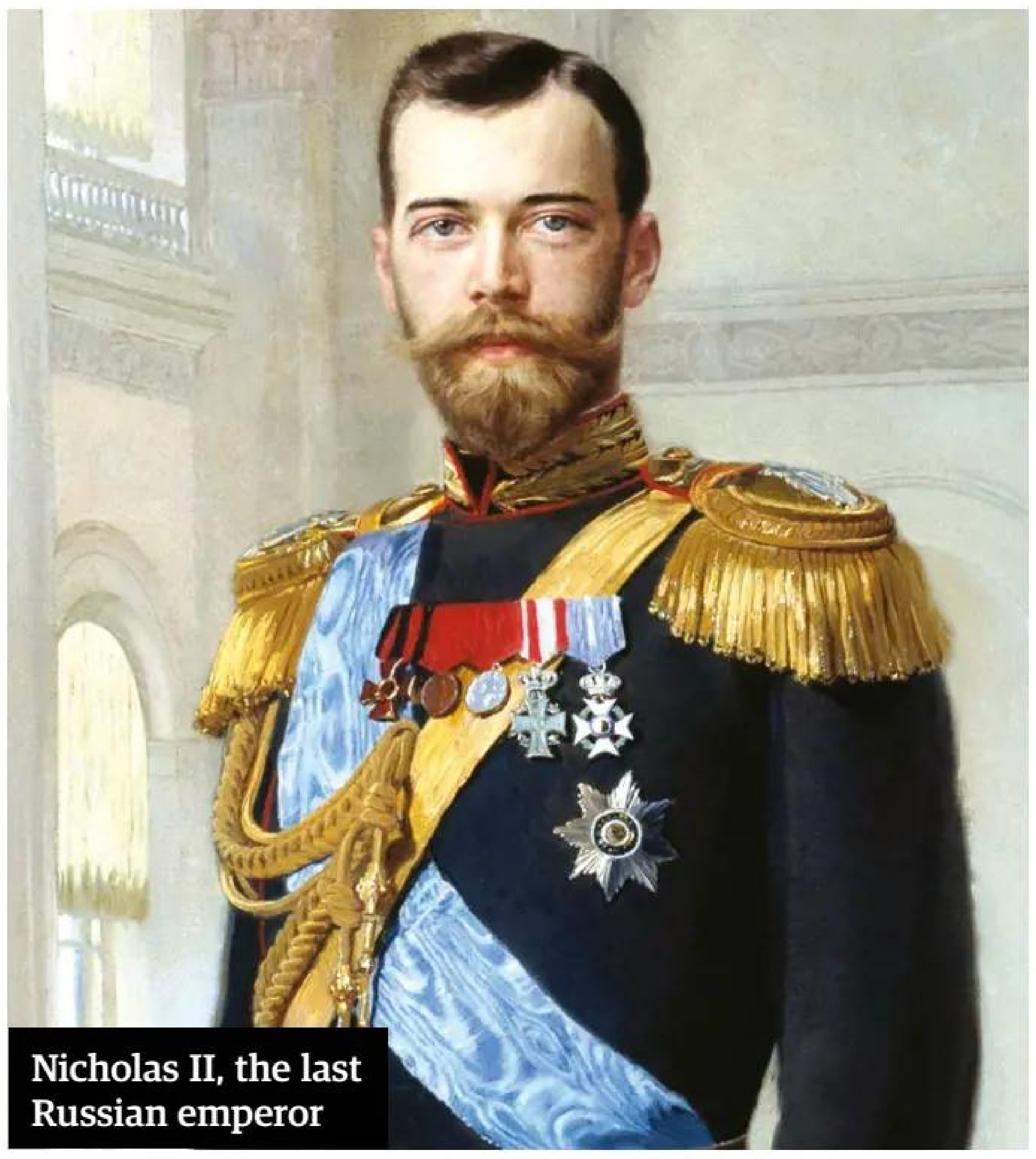
At the creation of the Russian Empire in 1721, 80 per cent of its peasants were serfs, owned by their noble masters and treated as private property to work the land. Serfdom had largely ended in Europe in the 14th century, but in Russia the system remained dominant.

Attempts at reform were haphazard and inconsistent. Alexander I, for example, allowed estate owners to liberate their own serfs but, not surprisingly, few were willing to abandon this source of free labour. Nicholas I readily admitted, "Serfdom is an evil. No one can have any doubts about this and the present situation cannot continue. At the moment, even to think of the emancipation of serfs would be to aim a blow at public discipline. But a way must be prepared for the gradual passing over to another order of things."

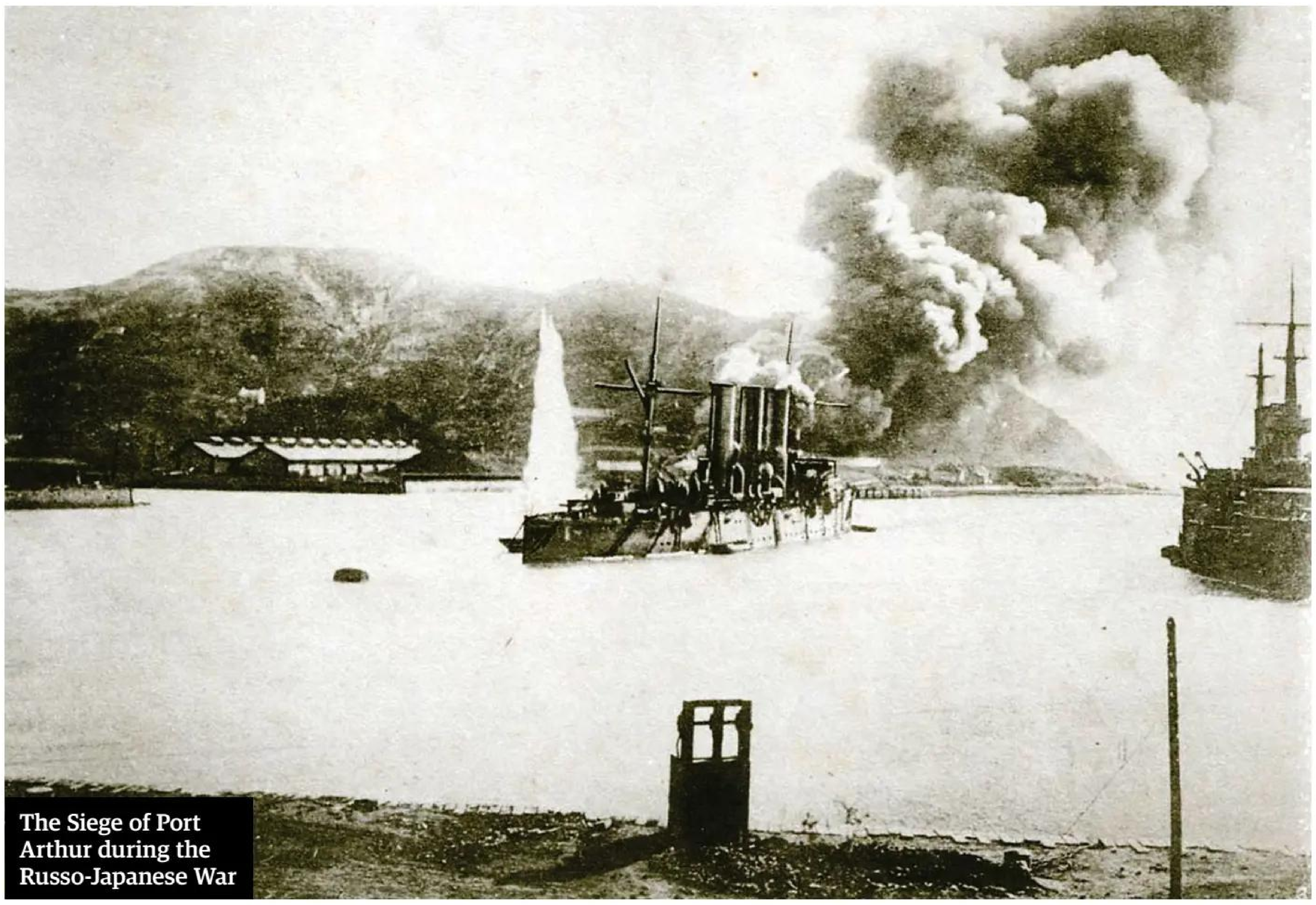
It was his son Alexander II who finally took the initiative. "It is better," the tsar explained, "to abolish serfdom from above than to wait till it begins to be abolished from below." On 19 February (Old Style) / 3 March (New Style) 1861, Alexander finally issued his Emancipation Manifesto, wiping away centuries of serfdom, two years before President Abraham Lincoln freed America's slaves.



Alexander I of Russia



Nicholas II, the last Russian emperor



The Siege of Port Arthur during the Russo-Japanese War

After the brief, oppressive reign of Catherine's son Paul ended in his assassination in 1801, the throne went to her grandson Alexander I. New liberal policies included easing of censorship and the promotion of education, and there was even talk of a limited constitution, though the latter issue gave way to other, more pressing concerns. Russia seemed to be in a state of perpetual war. After besting Persia, the empire incorporated Georgia and much of the Caucasus, increasing its march toward Central Asia. In 1809, Alexander seized Finland from a greatly weakened Sweden and proclaimed it a Russian Grand Duchy. Another military campaign against the Ottoman Empire won Russia control of east Moldavia in 1812.

After initially fighting – and losing to – Napoleon at Austerlitz, Russia had made an uneasy alliance with France in 1807, but this collapsed three years later. Then, in 1812, Napoleon made the mistake of ordering his Grand Armée to invade Russia. Like forces before and since, they found themselves defeated, not just by tsarist soldiers but by the harsh Russian winter. After taking Moscow, Napoleon was forced to retreat when its citizens set it ablaze. In 1814, Russians joined allied troops in marching on Paris and overthrowing the French emperor. The long and costly war won Russia control of the autonomous Kingdom of Poland.

Russia's victory over Napoleon resulted not in celebratory concessions, but rather in a period of reactionary rule. The press was muzzled and universities were forbidden to teach logic and natural sciences as these were ideas antithetical to the Orthodox Church. This repression fed discontent, especially among the many young army officers who had returned from the conflict in Europe imbued with republican ideas and intrigued by Western thought. When Alexander I died unexpectedly in 1825, they were determined to force concessions on his successor, Nicholas I. A group of aristocrats staged what became known as the Decembrist Revolt, demanding an end to the autocracy and a constitution. Nicholas ordered his loyal soldiers to put down the revolt; five of the conspirators were executed, hundreds of others were exiled to Siberia, and the empire swung wildly to the right.

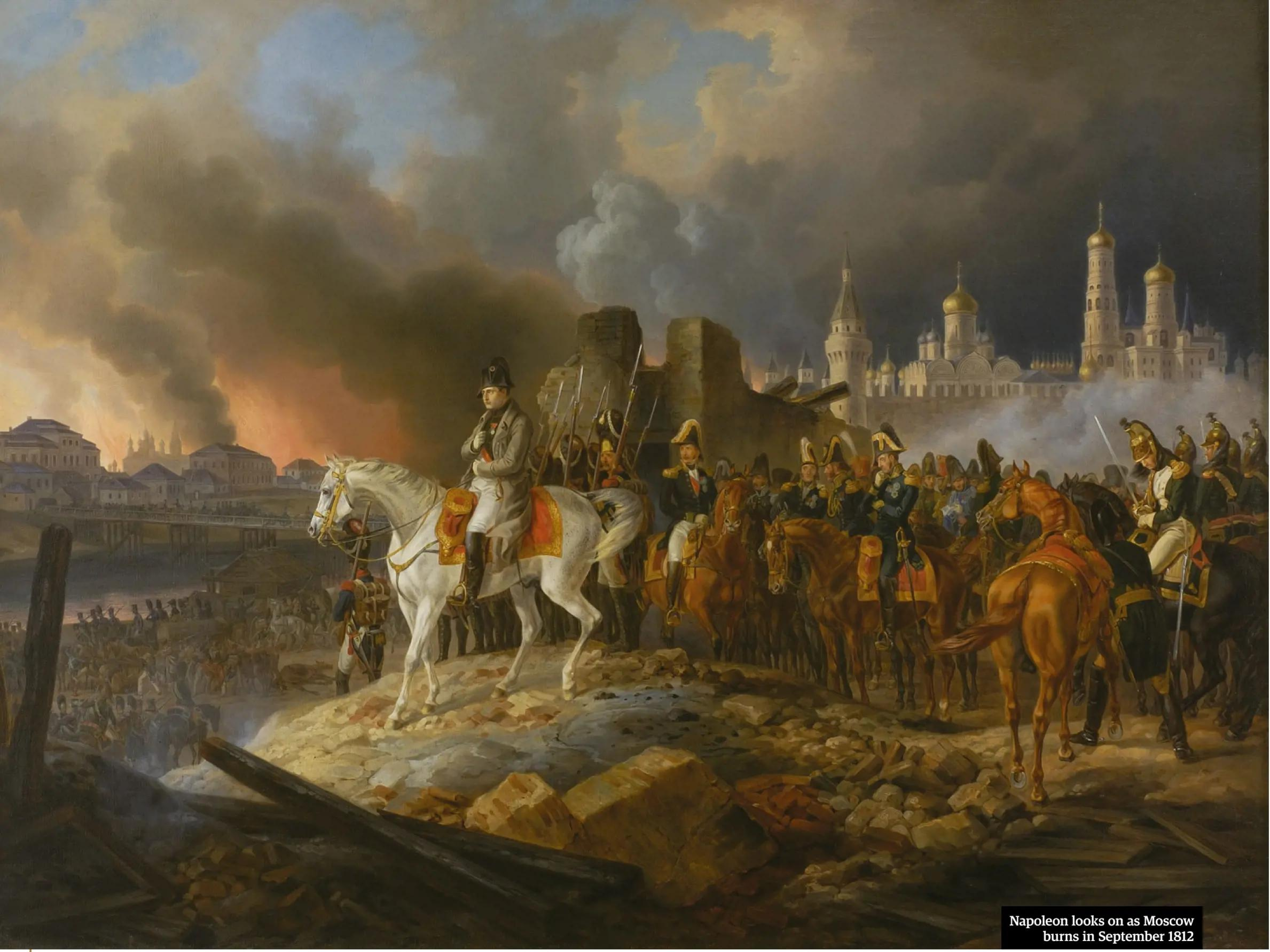
"A group of aristocrats staged what became known as the Decembrist Revolt"

It was a curious time for Russia. Nicholas I's reign saw the rise of Russian poetry and literature from the likes of Pushkin, Lermontov and Gogol, but it was an era of imperial repression. Nicholas imposed heavy censorship, restricted higher education, established the infamous Okhrana to spy on and arrest suspected dissidents, and embarked on a nationalistic policy that suppressed ethnic and religious minorities. Discontent grew, even as the empire engaged in military campaigns and won more territory, including present-day Armenia and Azerbaijan in Central Asia.

The Russian Army did well against inferior forces, but despite the brilliant uniforms and elegant parades that Nicholas I found so essential to ceremonial displays of power, it was poorly led and badly equipped. This became apparent in 1854 when the empire went to war with Great Britain, France and the Ottoman Empire in the Crimea. Europe had feared the 'Russian Bear' as a military threat; the Crimean War revealed that the Russian Bear was in fact crippled with a fatal weakness. By the time the war came to its ignoble end, Russia had been utterly defeated, humiliated and revealed as a decaying empire.

It was left to Nicholas' son Alexander II to clean up his father's mess. He ended the war and quickly embarked on a programme of liberal reforms designed to bring the empire into the modern age. For the first time, the empire had provincial representative bodies, zemstvos, that allowed the people a say in local issues; military reforms improved the army and eased corporal punishment; and the country won an independent judiciary, with an end to secret tribunals and the right to trial by jury. The most important reform came in 1861, when Alexander II freed Russia's 23 million serfs.

In 1867 the empire sold Alaska to the United States but otherwise preserved and even expanded its territory and influence, often through oppressive means. An 1863 rebellion by Polish nationals was ruthlessly put down as a warning to other ethnic minorities. In the Far East, Alexander II took advantage of the Opium Wars to wrest large



Napoleon looks on as Moscow burns in September 1812

parts of Manchuria from China, resulting in a new naval base at Vladivostok, while in Central Asia the empire conquered Turkestan, Bukhara and Khiva. The Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78 ended in a hollow victory when the European powers, wanting to keep Russian aspirations in the Balkans in check, refused to allow important territorial concessions. Even so, the empire reached its zenith under Alexander II. In 1721, it had consisted of approximately 12 million square kilometres; by 1881, it stood at 22.8 million square kilometres. From Vladivostok on the Pacific to concessions in Manchuria; from Central Asia to the Caucasus; from the Black Sea to the frigid northern tundra; from the Baltic to the Polish and Galician borders with Germany and Austria-Hungary, the Russian Empire had grown into a vast power, covering one-sixth of the land surface of the globe. Within its borders lived more than 100 different ethnic groups. Russians accounted for just under half of the total population: there were Jews, Balts, Finns, Poles, Georgians, Armenians, Tartars, Mongols and Central Asians, a diverse mixture of warring tongues, cultures and loyalties that increasingly rebelled against Russian domination.

Ironically, Alexander II's reforms only fanned disillusion. Students and workers wanted more; repeating the familiar pattern in Russian history, Alexander responded by enacting conservative policies, which only further pushed the dispossessed toward dangerous ideas. Some turned to the Populist Movement, which championed the peasantry and looked to them to ignite a revolution. When it became apparent that the peasants were more concerned with their daily struggles than with overthrowing the autocracy, the Populists splintered; from their ashes arose a new generation in the late 1870s, one of radicalised voices who embraced terrorism as a means to an end. Among them was the group Narodnaya Volya, (People's Will), whose members were determined to overthrow the autocracy. In 1881, and after numerous attempts, they assassinated Alexander II.

> "Some turned to the Populist Movement, which championed the peasantry"

The next 13 years under Alexander III saw the empire maintain its reactionary policies, heavy censorship and an enforced nationalism that oppressed ethnic and religious minorities. At the same time, though, the country took immense leaps toward modern industrialisation. Roads and railways, including the famous Trans-Siberian, spread across the country, and the number of factories more than tripled as foreign investment swelled. But these new factories, with their lack of safety regulations and atrocious conditions, soon became breeding grounds for a new generation of dispossessed workers desperate for reforms and seething with discontent.

These conflicting strains continued under Nicholas II. Firmly convinced that his position as autocrat was mandated by God and bolstered in this belief by his unstable wife, Alexandra, he rejected calls for reform and popular representation as "senseless dreams". Few thought him an effective ruler: in 1904 his clumsy attempts at colonising Manchuria led to the Russo-Japanese War, which a year later resulted in the empire's defeat.

RUSSIA'S JEWS

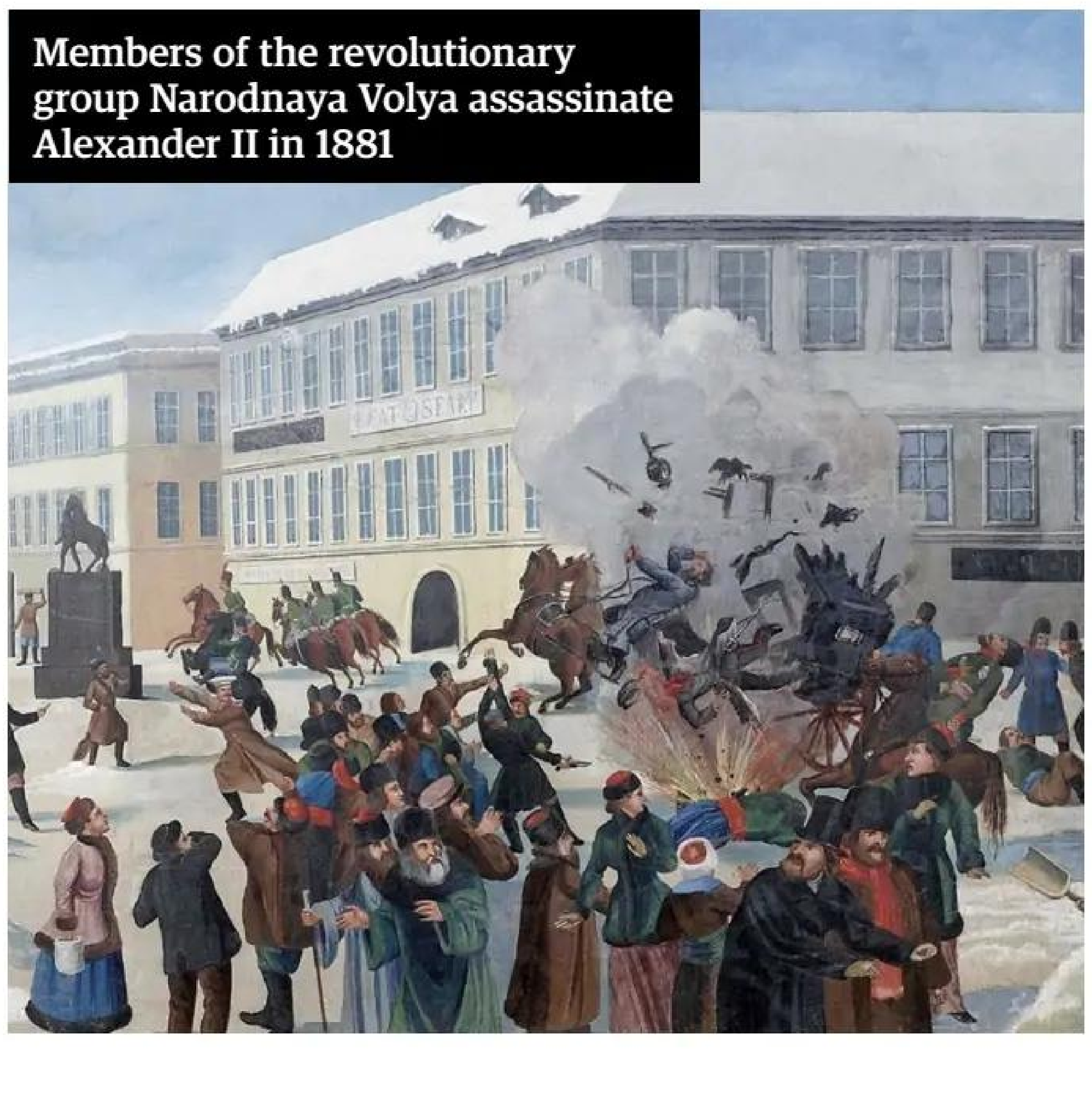
Although they were the largest minority, Russia's Jews endured centuries of government-endorsed anti-Semitism

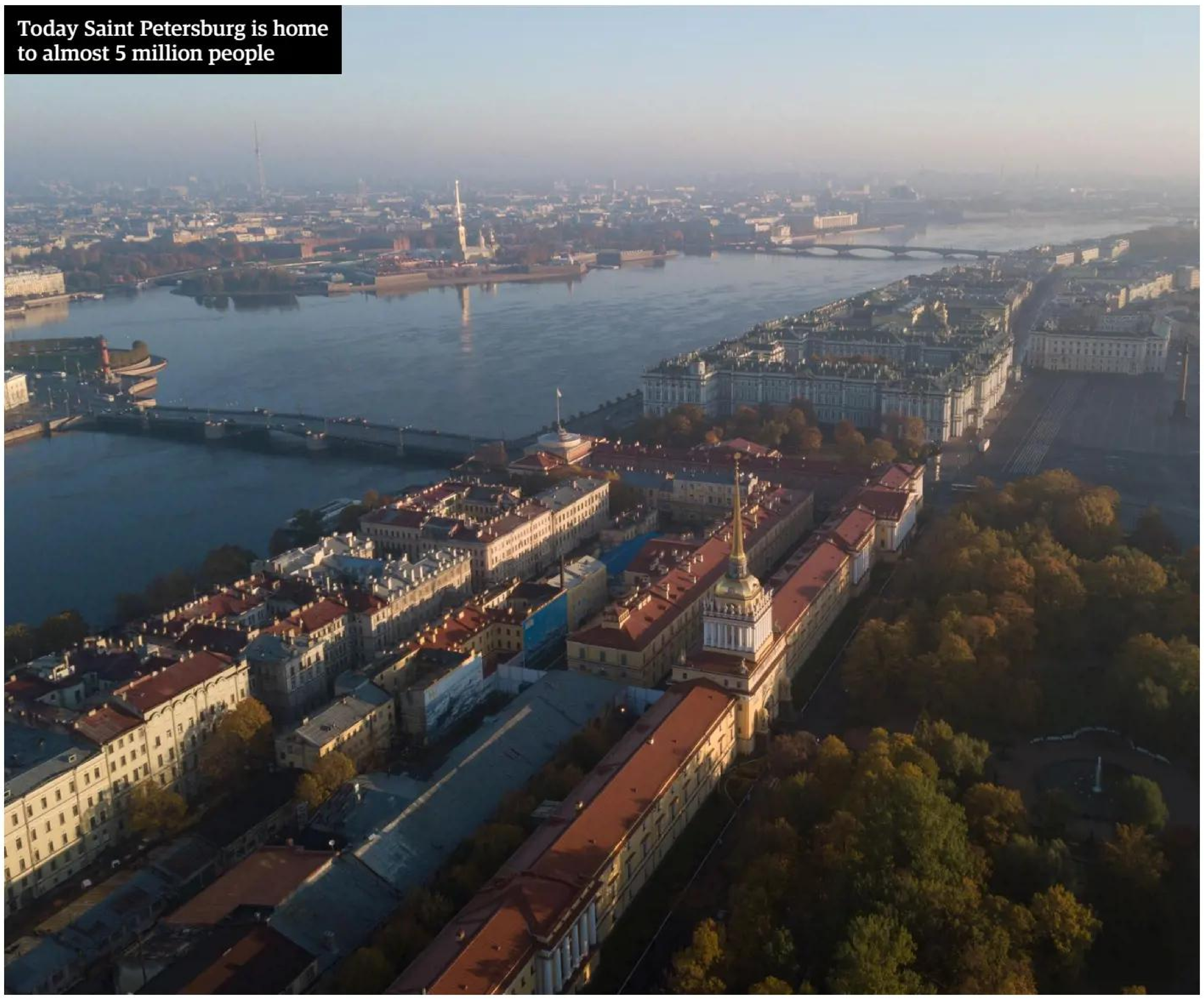
Relatives view the bodies of victims of a pogrom in Odessa

The Russian Empire was home to half of the world's Jewish population. They had always been singled out for discrimination in the staunchly Orthodox country, but the government repeatedly issued laws that emphasised anti-Semitic practices.

In 1791, Catherine the Great restricted most Jews to the new Pale of Settlement, stretching along the western edge of Russia into eastern Poland and Lithuania and south to encompass the Ukraine and Bessarabia. Successive Romanovs usually restricted rights: Jews, for example, were forbidden from military promotions unless they converted and quotas severely restricted their access to education.

This oppression reached a zenith under the last two tsars. Pogroms, tacitly endorsed and occasionally actually promoted by the state, became widespread. Travel was restricted and Jews were forbidden to own mortgages, enter the legal profession without permission and work in most bureaucratic offices. The government imposed onerous taxes on kosher meat and on synagogues, and forbade Jews from trading on Sundays or Russian Orthodox holidays, or from even patronising Christian businesses. After 1905, some of these restrictions eased as Nicholas II was forced to make concessions, but the tsar personally remained anti-Semitic, referring to Jews as 'Yids' and even embracing the infamous Protocols of the Elders of Zion as evidence of the "destroying hand of Jewry".


Members of the revolutionary group Narodnaya Volya assassinate Alexander II in 1881


Today Saint Petersburg is home to almost 5 million people

> "Ironically, Alexander II's reforms only fanned disillusion"

The war brought discontent to the forefront. The strikes, pogroms and political assassinations that had characterised the first decade of Nicholas II's rule now swelled into open rebellion, especially after January 1905, when tsarist troops shot down hundreds of protesting workers in a tragedy that became known as Bloody Sunday. The Black Sea Fleet mutinied and by October a general strike had paralysed the country. Desperate to save his throne, Nicholas reluctantly granted the country a constitution and a parliament, known as the Duma. This was a constitutional experiment fraught with difficult growing pains: the first two Dumas proved too radical and the tsar illegally had them closed. Only by altering the voting laws did he finally get a less troublesome legislature, though it remained a perpetual thorn in Nicholas II's side and an unwelcome reminder that he had signed away his autocratic power.

It took several years for Russia to recover from the revolution of 1905, but under Prime Minister Peter Stolypin the empire began moving swiftly towards the modern age. Censorship was eased, industry continued its expansion and the empire's output of steel, iron and coal more than doubled. Laws banned child labour in many factories and introduced limits on the amount of hours that could be worked, although conditions were still often deplorable. Foreign investment flowed freely: by 1913, nearly one-third of the world's capital went to Russia, and the empire enjoyed a higher credit rating than Imperial Germany. Incomes rose and agricultural reforms allowed 7 million peasants to purchase their own farms. It seemed as if the empire had indeed turned a corner and was on the verge of becoming an economic power.

Then came the summer of 1914, when Nicholas II foolishly gave in to nationalistic pressures and backed Serbia in the aftermath of Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination in Sarajevo. The First World War proved a disaster for the Russian Empire, whose soldiers were poorly trained and even more poorly equipped for modern warfare. Military losses fuelled discontent, especially after Nicholas II assumed supreme command of his army and left his wife in charge of the government.

If anything, Alexandra's judgment was even worse than her husband's, reliant as she was on the counsel of the notorious mystic Gregory Rasputin, whose prayer she believed kept her haemophiliac son Alexei alive. Repeated defeats and political incompetence eventually reached a crescendo in February 1917, when Petrograd (as Saint Petersburg had been renamed in 1914) erupted in revolution. Faced with the open rebellion of his government and his army high command, Nicholas II abdicated on 2 March (Old Style) / 15 March (New Style), bringing the Russian Empire to its end.

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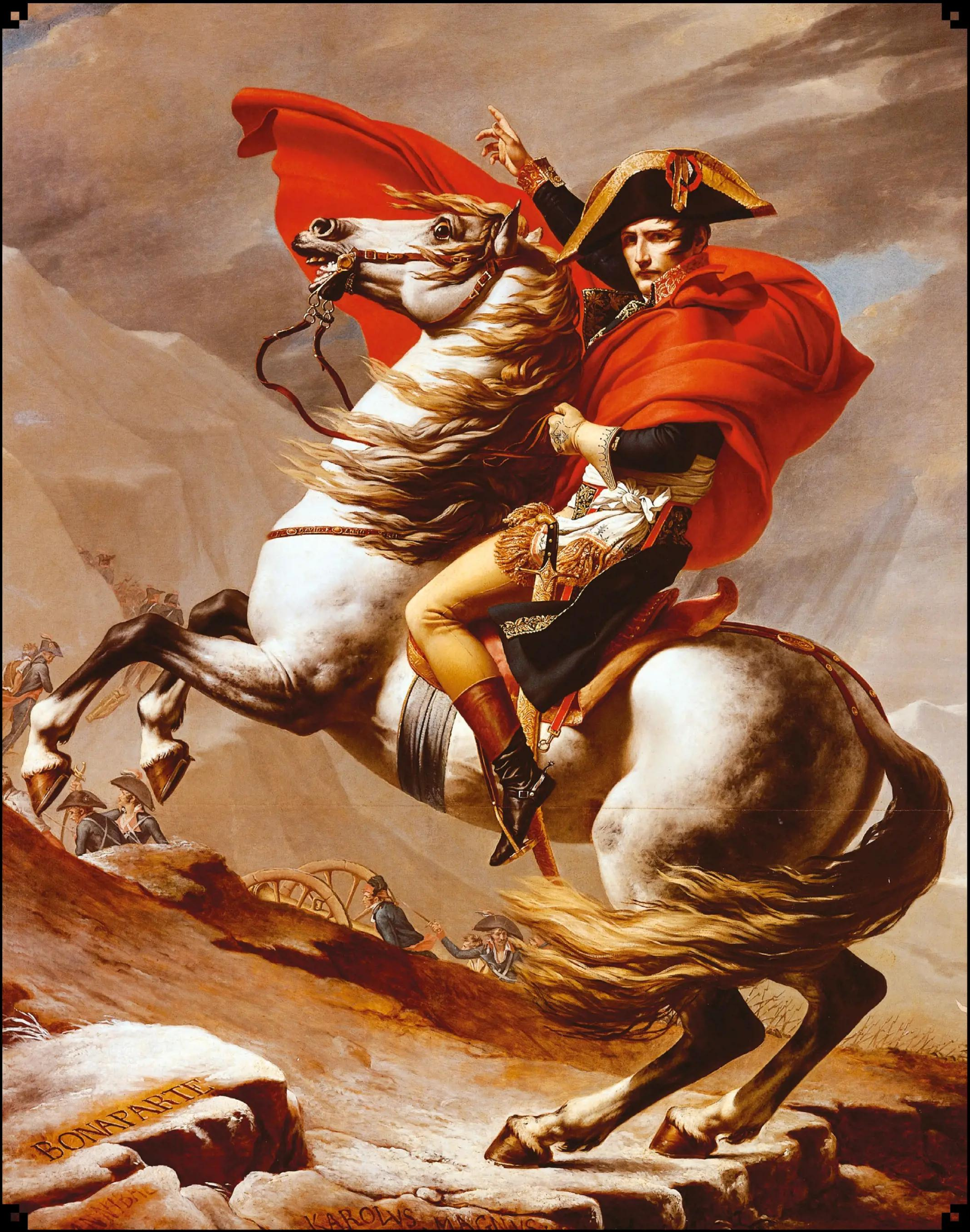

BONAPARTE
KAROLVS MAGNVS

THE FRENCH EMPIRE

Inspired by the great empires of Alexander the Great and Charlemagne, the young Napoleon Bonaparte had an absolute belief that it was his destiny to lead the fledgling French Republic to greatness

Written by Melanie Clegg

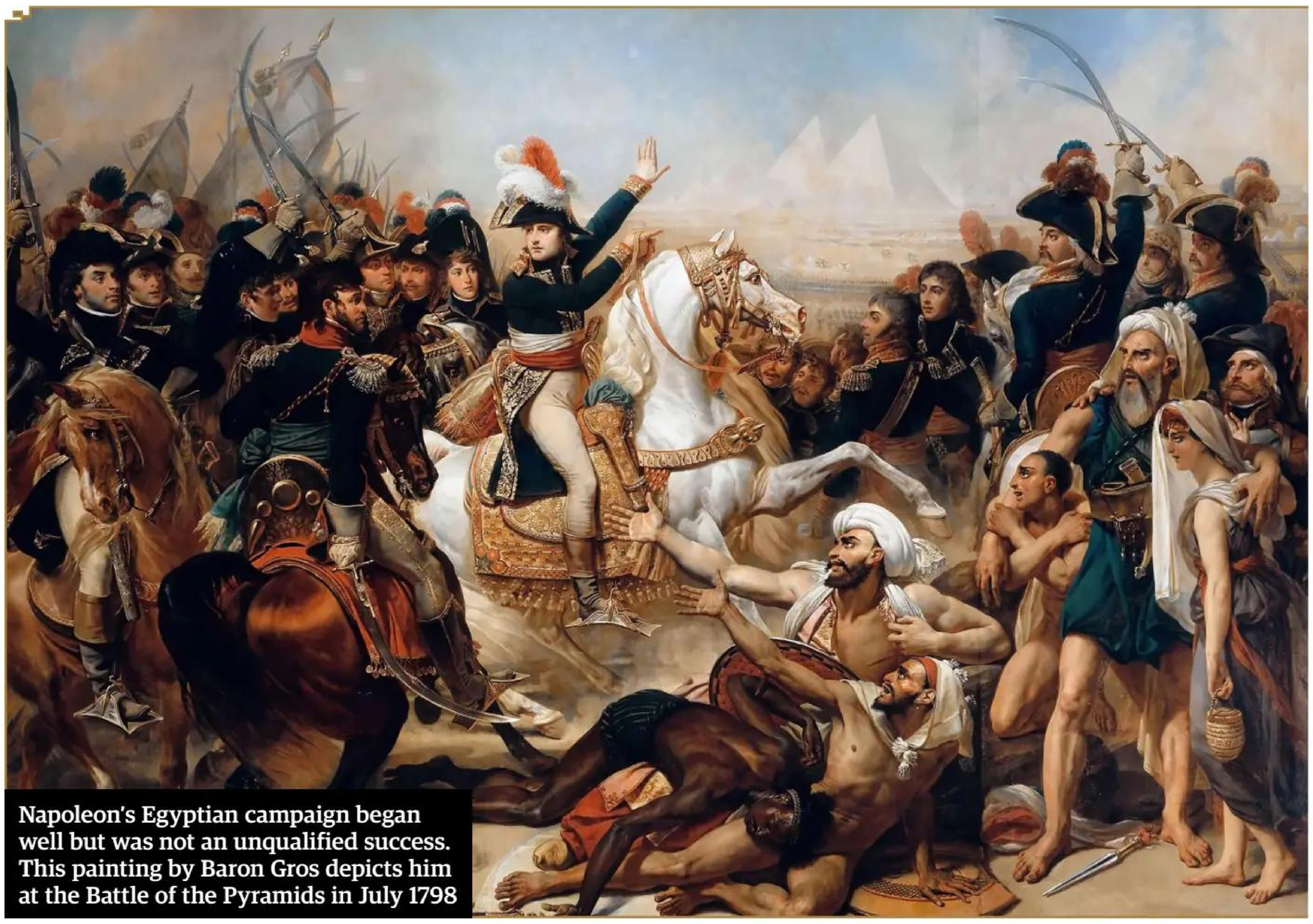
From the first moment that the young general Napoleon Bonaparte seized power and became First Consul in 1799, it was clear that he had ambitions not just to extend French territories, but to create a great empire that would rival those forged by his military heroes Alexander the Great, Charlemagne and Julius Caesar. Meanwhile, widespread opposition elsewhere in Europe to the republican values espoused by the French Revolution had led to France going to war against several neighbouring nations, including Britain and Austria. What started as modest territorial gains would eventually, by the end of the century, become a deliberate policy to extend French territory and in the process spread the ideologies of the revolution itself.

For Napoleon, who believed himself to be the saviour of the French people and the natural successor – and perhaps even reincarnation – of the great Frankish ruler and Holy Roman emperor Charlemagne, it seemed entirely fitting that the violent upheaval and unrest of the French Revolution, which had freed the people from bonds that had enslaved them for centuries, should be the catalyst for a golden age of conquest and prosperity.

Napoleon's first successes were as commander of the Army of Italy, which was notoriously undisciplined, poorly organised and unsuccessful until his arrival. Under Napoleon's command, the army enjoyed notable success against the Italian and Austrian armies, which had formed a coalition against the French, capturing Italian territory, including Piedmont and Mantua, along the way. Spurred on by his astonishing successes in Italy, Napoleon was confident of further victories when he led his troops even further afield to Egypt and Syria, accompanied by a band of artists, historians and archaeologists. However, although the campaign was initially very successful, a series of defeats – most notably against the British who were defending their own colonial interests in north Africa – meant that Napoleon's army was ultimately forced to withdraw and return to France.

Although the Egyptian campaign had not been an unqualified success, it had enormously raised Napoleon's profile both in France and overseas, bringing him one step closer to the absolute power that he already craved. And although his clash with the colonial ambitions of the British had ultimately ended in disaster, it had widened the scope of his vision to encompass the possibility of creating a new colonial empire for the French that would be even greater than that overseen by Great Britain. His own personal dislike and mistrust of the British, whom he believed to be the absolute antithesis of the newly liberated, modern and energetic republican French, was a significant factor in Napoleon's plans to extend French territory, increase their colonial influence and unify the European mainland. For Napoleon, the invasion and conquest of other countries was not a hostile act but one of liberation, as it would bring the pure ideologies of the French Revolution to the rest of Europe.

Over the next few years, Napoleon and his forces continued to advance into Italy. They seized vast amounts of territory including Genoa, Naples and Tuscany as they went and created a new Italian Republic with Milan, which the French had tried and ultimately failed to seize control of during the Italian Wars several centuries earlier, at the very heart of this new French outpost. At the same time, French troops were pushing into Germany and the Netherlands, seizing a significant amount of territory – all of which went a long way towards reinforcing Napoleon's position as de facto and then actual ruler of France, which was confirmed when he was crowned emperor by the pope in 1804.



Napoleon's Egyptian campaign began well but was not an unqualified success. This painting by Baron Gros depicts him at the Battle of the Pyramids in July 1798

> "The ignominious retreat from Russia was followed by a gradual dwindling of France's territorial gains"

Napoleon's efforts to extend French rule would continue for the next decade, with significant success – when the French Empire was at its peak in 1812, it ruled over an astonishing 70 million people, who lived in 130 departments all over mainland Europe and comprising Spain, Italy, Germany and large swathes of the Netherlands and Poland. Inspired by the Roman model, Napoleon actually took a paternal interest in the countries that his empire absorbed. He introduced his own civil code, known as the Napoleonic code, which was designed to make life fairer and more egalitarian for all of his citizens, including women and children, and abolished the aristocratic privileges that had, he believed, been holding Europe back from true progress and enlightenment.

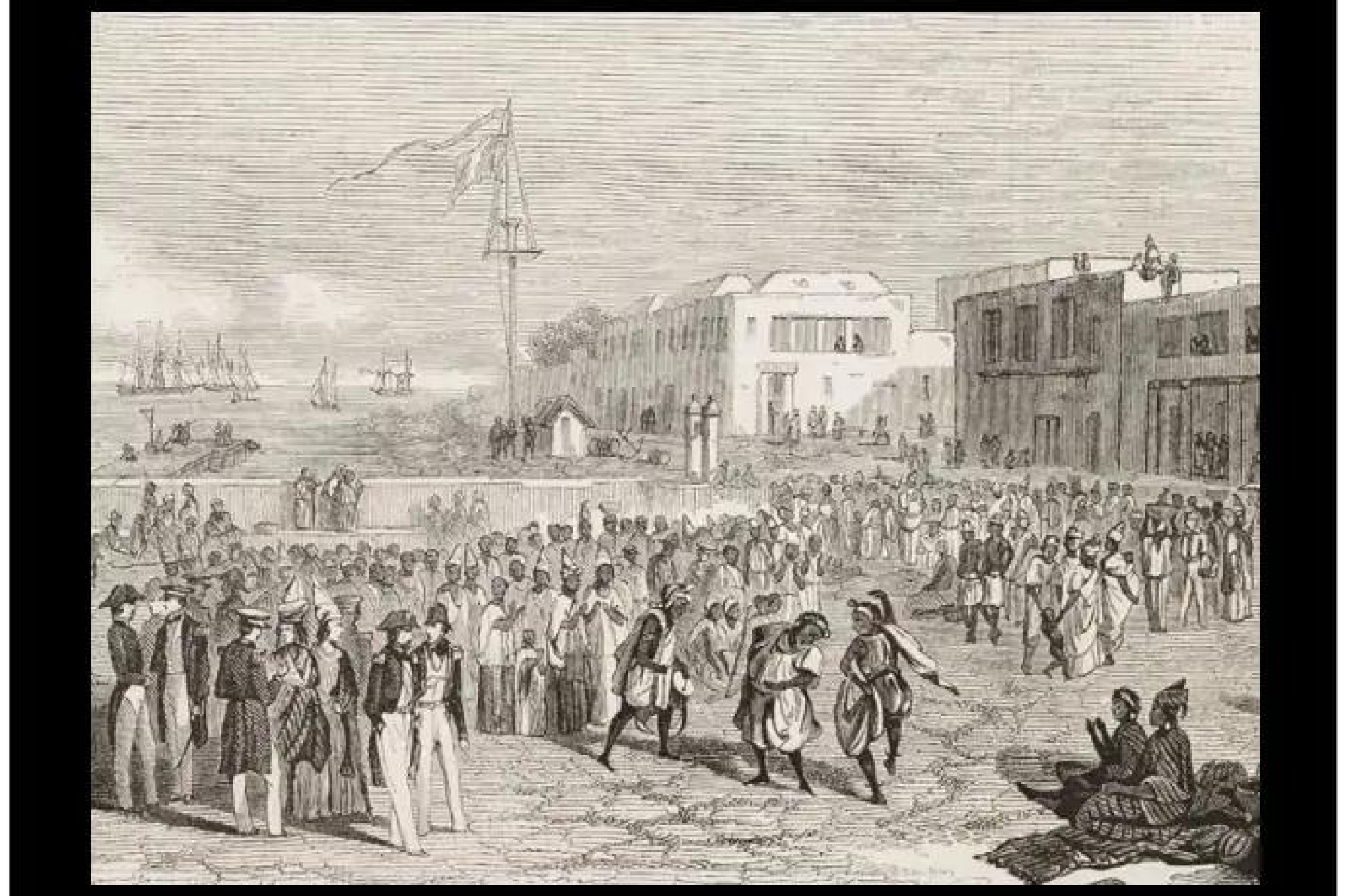
Furthermore, although he maintained strict control of all territory, he developed a policy of placing his own family members into positions of power and influence in these newly conquered lands, often replacing the hereditary monarchs that had he deposed or marrying close family members into the royal families of allies in order to strengthen the bonds between them. Although Napoleon, who regarded himself as a self-made man driven by his own ambition and sense of destiny, had no great love for the old ruling Houses and aristocracy of Europe, he nonetheless understood that people needed figureheads. He also saw this as an opportunity to increase the prestige and grandeur of his own family and, by extension, himself, by setting his sisters and brothers up in their own magnificent courts across Europe, where they would exist as highly visible proof of French might.

However, this advancement of the rapacious and not entirely loyal Bonaparte family would prove to be one part of his undoing – there had been everything to play for when he remained childless, but as soon as his second wife, Marie Louise of Austria, presented him with his much-longed-for son, who was now heir to his father's vast dominions, cracks quickly began to appear in the Bonaparte faction. At the same time, the French people, initially so supportive of Napoleon's military expeditions, were rapidly losing enthusiasm for the cost, both financial and human (especially after the 1812 Russian campaign, during which an estimated half a million French soldiers lost their lives in just over five months), of their ruler's territorial and dynastic ambitions.

The terrible failure of the Russian campaign was to prove a significant turning point in Napoleon's career as it catastrophically weakened his forces and also his prestige at home and abroad, leading Prussia and Austria to break their alliances with the French and throw in their lot with the British. The ignominious retreat from Russia was followed by a gradual dwindling of France's territorial gains over the last decade, losing Germany, Spain and the Netherlands and being pushed back beyond their own borders until finally Napoleon was forced to abdicate in 1814. His brief return to power a year later came to a decisive and final end a year later at Waterloo, which also marked the final death throes of the glorious empire that he had worked so hard to create.

THE FRENCH COLONIAL EMPIRE

Although French colonial acquisitions had been steadily increasing since the 16th century, they peaked and indeed doubled during the reign of Napoleon III



An engraving of local people dancing in the square on the island of Gorée during an official French visit to Senegal

While Napoleon I had concentrated the majority of his efforts on extending his territory across continental Europe, his nephew Napoleon III took a great personal interest in the development and expansion of France's colonial territories, which he saw as the key to increasing France's wealth and prestige across the globe. The French already owned significant amounts of land by the middle of the 19th century and these holdings would more than double under the auspices of Napoleon III, who had grand visions of expanding into Asia as well as further into Africa.

Although attempts to gain footholds in Korea and Japan were doomed to failure, Napoleon III had many notable successes, aided by his bold new Ministry of the Navy and the Colonies. This oversaw a complete overhaul of the French navy and dealt with the administration of the French colonies, such as the takeover of New Caledonia in Canada in 1853, the colonisation of Senegal in 1854, the sending of a joint Franco-British expeditionary force into China in the late 1850s, the takeover of significant territories in Vietnam and Cambodia and an increased military presence in Algeria, which had been under French rule since 1830 but only now was brought entirely to heel.

When Napoleon died a sad and lonely exile in May 1821, it initially seemed as though the grand dynastic ambitions of the Bonaparte family had died with him. His surviving siblings were obviously keen to distance themselves from him, while his sole legitimate male heir, the son that he had had such high hopes for, was effectively a prisoner of his Austrian relatives in Vienna. No one could have predicted that just over 30 years after Napoleon drew his last breath, another Bonaparte emperor would be sitting on the French throne.

Napoleon III was the son of Napoleon's stepdaughter Hortense de Beauharnais and his elder brother Louis Bonaparte, a union that had been arranged by Empress Joséphine in order to secure her own position at Napoleon's side when it became clear that she would be unable to give him an heir.

Napoleon III had bided his time in exile until the moment came for him to return to France and seize power, first as president from 1848 and then as emperor from 1852.

Crucially, unlike his uncle, Napoleon III had spent a great deal of time in the united Kingdom and had built a warm relationship with the establishment there. The British government was no doubt greatly reassured by his public proclamation that for him "the empire means peace", and that he had no desire to emulate his war-mongering uncle. However, peaceable though he may have seemed, Napoleon III was no pushover and he was still extremely ambitious for the French people.

Like his uncle, Napoleon III was keen to greatly enhance the prestige and international influence both of himself and France, but he did so by employing skillful diplomacy and making friends rather than enemies. In this he achieved notable success – particularly with regards to the British. The friendship between the two nations was sealed by their alliance against Russia during the Crimean War, which did much to reinforce Napoleon III's position as a major player on the international stage.

Emboldened by the success of this venture, Napoleon III then followed in his uncle's footsteps and turned his attention towards the Italian peninsula, forging a deal with King Victor Emmanuel of Piedmont-Sardinia wherein he would be given Nice and Savoy in exchange for his assistance in liberating the country from the Austrian Empire. The ensuing war dragged on for several years but ultimately resulted in a victory for France and a welcome increase to their territory.

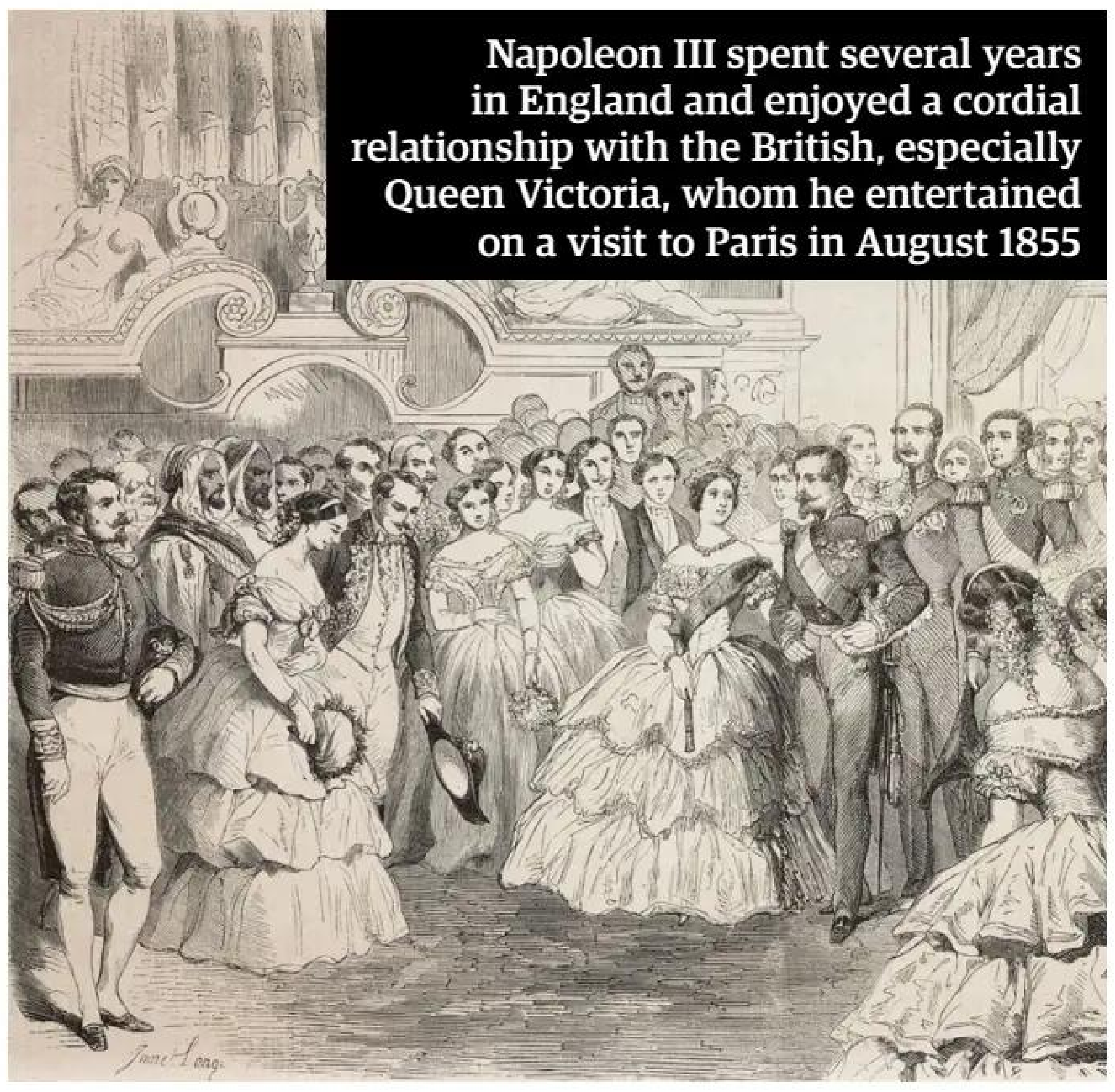
However, although it ended well, the war cost Napoleon III a great deal of his support at home in France, thanks in part to his meddling in the powers of the papacy. He thenceforth concentrated his efforts on emulating the British and building up the French colonial assets in South America, Africa and Asia, most notably in China and Cambodia. Despite some setbacks along the way – such as when attempts to gain a foothold in Japan and Korea came to nothing – he was so successful in doing so that he more than doubled the size of the French colonial empire during his reign.

"Napoleon III was no pushover and he was still extremely ambitious for the French people"

Although Napoleon III has suffered in comparison to his uncle, often being likened to a pale imitation of the first Bonaparte emperor, he was nonetheless a successful ruler in his own right. He had notable success overseeing and extending his empire, even if he did so without the same bombastic panache and military genius, relying instead on building alliances and investing in the wider French colonial territories.

However, as with his uncle, Napoleon III's dreams of glory were destined to ultimately fail thanks to a combination of his own weak health, the distrust of his allies who suspected that he had designs upon neighbouring Luxembourg and Belgium, and, most crucially, the rise of a new Prussian empire immediately east, which had great ambitions to create a new German superpower by ending the uneasy coalition that existed between France, Britain, Russia and Austria.

Despite Napoleon III's efforts to avert conflict, which intensified after the Prussians defeated the Austrians in 1866 and he found himself short of allies, he was forced to declare war against Prussia in July 1870. The ensuing war was a total disaster for the French and was over by the start of September after a string of terrible defeats – beaten, exhausted and humiliated, Napoleon III surrendered to the Prussians and was taken prisoner. When he was eventually released six months later, he returned once again to exile in England, his reign over, his empire in tatters and the Bonaparte ascendancy at an end.

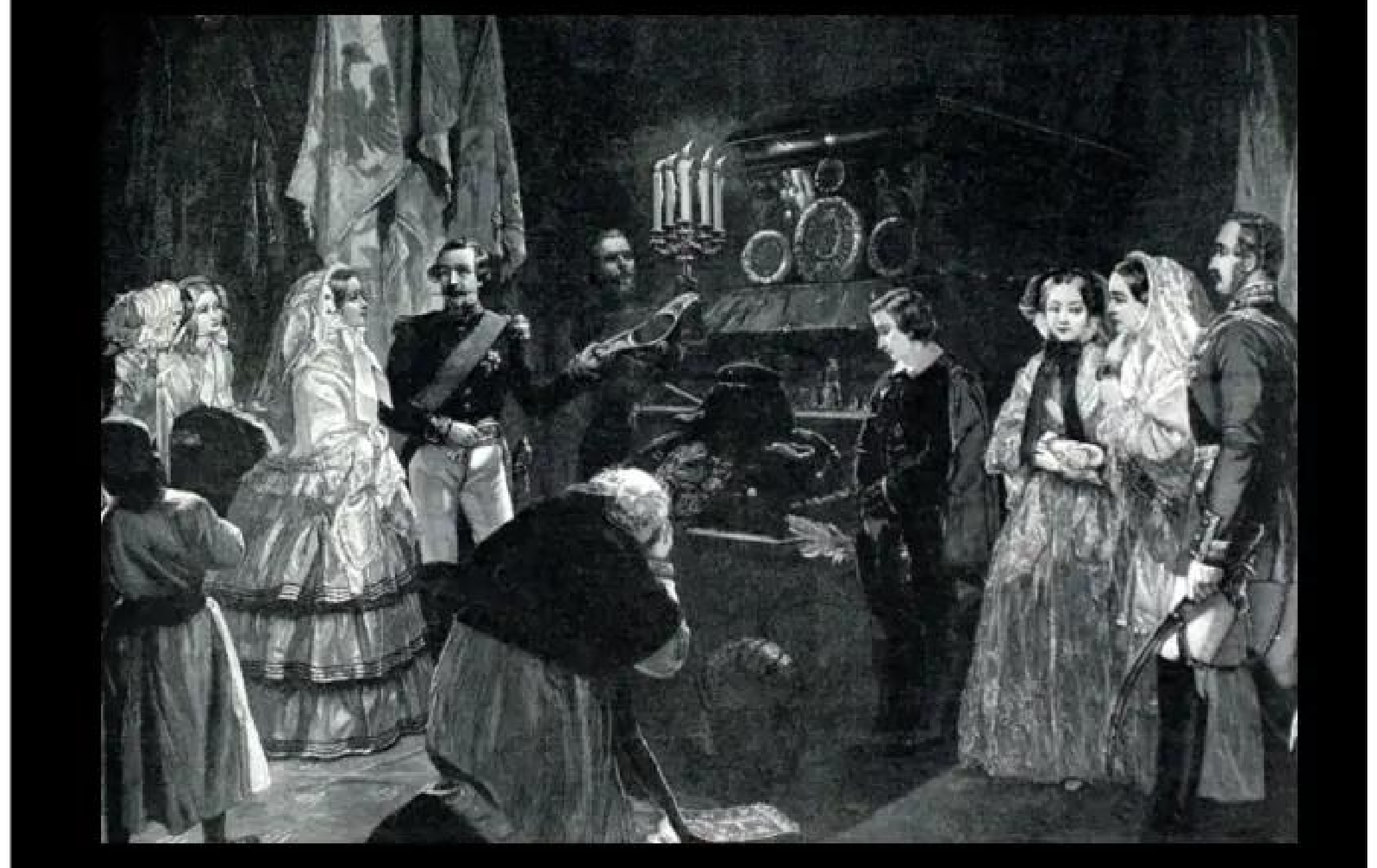

Napoleon III spent several years in England and enjoyed a cordial relationship with the British, especially Queen Victoria, whom he entertained on a visit to Paris in August 1855

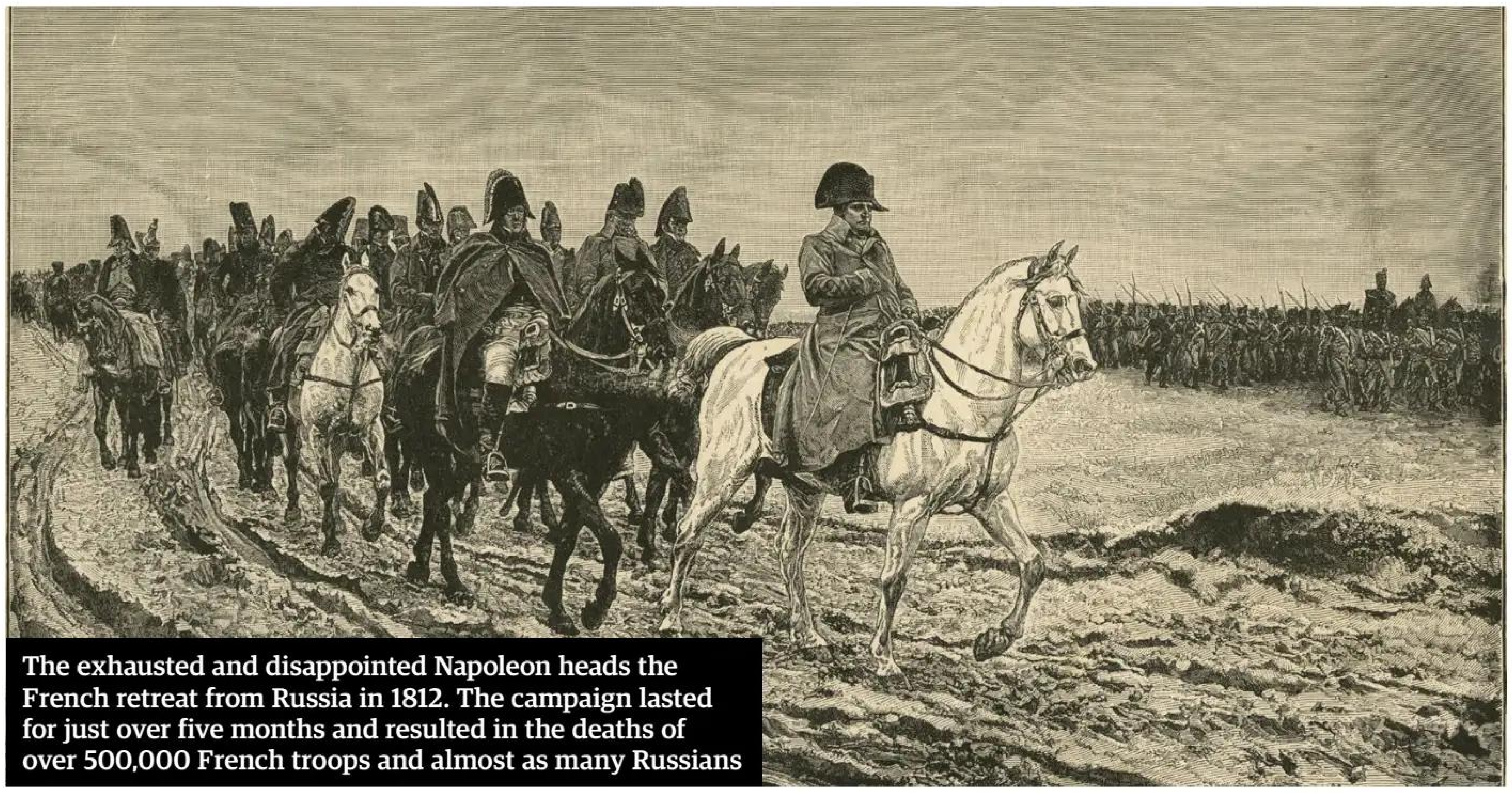
UNLIKELY FRIENDS

While Napoleon I's foreign policy had been dominated by his loathing of the British and determination to defeat them on land and at sea, his nephew Napoleon III had a very different approach

Waterloo may have been a distant memory when the future Queen Victoria was born in May 1819, but the spectre of Napoleon still cast a long shadow across Europe, particularly in Britain, which had been one of his most bitter enemies. It's entirely understandable therefore that Victoria should have been suspicious of his nephew Napoleon III, even if he had spent several years in England and was clearly keen to create a friendly alliance between their nations.

However, when Napoleon and his wife Eugénie visited London in April 1855, it was a total success as Victoria was completely charmed by them both and even privately described the emperor as "a very extraordinary man". When Victoria, Albert and their two eldest children paid a return visit to Paris in August that year, during which Napoleon III threw Victoria a lavish ball in the palace of Versailles and took her on a private tour of Marie Antoinette's Petit Trianon, the bond between the two rulers became even closer. This was then reflected in the increasingly warm relations between Britain and France, which would continue until Napoleon's eventual fall from power, and it had a significant effect on the success of his empire.


Although just over 40 years had passed since Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo, it still must have been a surreal moment for all present when his nephew Napoleon III escorted Queen Victoria on a special private visit to Napoleon's tomb in the Invalides, Paris


The exhausted and disappointed Napoleon heads the French retreat from Russia in 1812. The campaign lasted for just over five months and resulted in the deaths of over 500,000 French troops and almost as many Russians

© Getty Images

THE AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN EMPIRE

1867-1918

The Baroque final phase in a 500-year story of Habsburg domination in Central Europe, the awkward constitutional settlement of the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy was not built to last. Marginalised by the ascendancy of Prussia, Austro-Hungary instead looked to the Balkans to grow, making an enemy of Serbia, with fatal consequences for world peace.

Emperor Meiji dragged Japan into the modern world, elevating it to imperial status within a single generation

THE EMPIRE OF JAPAN

Japan's imperial adventure saw it rise from an insular, conservative state into one of the world's leading imperial powers, unleashing years of pent-up resentment

Written by Hareth Al Bustani

The rise and fall of the Empire of Japan was bookended by two of the most seismic cultural shifts in the country's history. The samurai class was eradicated and power was restored to the emperor, who oversaw Japan's stratospheric rise to modern superpower status. At its peak, the empire's grasp exceeded its reach, and ultimately, in the face of utter devastation, Japan was born anew.

In the 12th century, imperial authority in Japan was usurped by the samurai warrior class. Though the country would retain a figurehead emperor, for the next 700 years true power remained within an ever-shifting network of samurai clans. In 1853, the Japanese caught their first glimpse of the American Commodore Perry's fleet of four enormous warships. Though the Tokugawa shogunate had presided over two and a half centuries of peace, many now realised its policy of rigid conservatism and isolationism had left Japan trailing far behind the West.

Eager to wrest power away from the Tokugawa, a group of feudal lords allied to overthrow the shōgun, handing power to emperor Meiji. The new government rapidly began revolutionising the very building blocks of Japanese society. At the time, Japan's foreign treaties subjected it to trade barriers, and provided diplomatic immunity to foreign criminals. Desperate to renegotiate these treaties, the empire sent half its leading figures across the world. Though this endeavour failed in its main objective, it highlighted Japan's most significant gaps in its development.

Following this, the government rolled out national education and tax systems, as well as a national army, complete with conscription. Feudal lords were forced to hand back their domains in return for cushy pensions and entrance into the legal aristocracy. The Ryukyu Islands, stretching towards Taiwan, which had long retained their own culture and had paid tribute to China, were annexed and colonised, with the king forced to adapt to life in Tokyo. Samurai were paid stipends, but their entire identity had been tied to the legal status they had now lost.

The Tokugawa had left behind unified markets and well-developed transportation and distribution networks. Building upon thriving silk, tea and sake industries, the country began importing raw cotton and exporting clothes. It also set about reforming commerce; establishing a central bank, allowing the sale of land, acquiring all major mines and manufacturing facilities, and investing heavily in new munitions plants. It brought in foreign engineers by the droves – accounting for over one-third of the Ministry of Industry's budget in 1874.

In 1889, the country's constitution was promulgated and the first national election was held the next year, introducing a government modelled on Prussian and Austrian institutions. Until now, China had always been the dominant local superpower. After the Meiji Restoration, Korea, long a vassal of the Chinese Empire, objected to signing trade treaties with the Japanese emperor for fear of rocking the boat. Japan considered invading – the best defence against the imperial powers would be to expand its own sphere of influence. However, just as Commodore Perry's warships intimidated Japan into trade agreements in 1853, Japan used the same trick on Korea in 1876 to similar success. The status quo was changing.

Japan's increasingly imperialist foreign adventures drew it into conflict with China in 1894 over supremacy in Korea. The brief war was hugely popular among Japanese politicians, with decisive victories on land and sea. The Chinese not only left Korea, but handed Japan the Liatung peninsula and Taiwan. However, with Asian ambitions of their own, Russia, France and Germany asked Japan to return Liatung to China – reinforcing the growing empire's suspicions about foreign powers. Having finally secured a more favourable treaty with the British, it seemed Japan's star was on the rise.

At the turn of the century, Japan joined the international coalition against the Boxer Rebellion in China with great reluctance. As an instrumental part of the victory, Japan was outraged when Russia not only took its time withdrawing from Manchuria, but dug in. The two went to war in 1904

Before the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japanese society was dominated by the samurai warrior class

and, to the world's surprise, Japan won – defeating the Russian fleet and scoring not only enhanced holdings in Manchuria, but half of the Russian island of Sakhalin, and all of Korea. Japan was officially an empire.

The death of Emperor Meiji in 1912 was a defining moment for Japan; in a single generation it had gone from a sluggish recluse to one of the world's great powers. The population, 33 million in 1877, had risen by 50 per cent – with 171,543 living in Korea alone. Japan's ally, Britain, even invited its support in World War I.

However, rather than simply fighting the Germans at sea, the Japanese profited from the chaos, seizing Germany's holdings in Shandong and the Pacific islands and attempting to enforce an oppressive list of demands on the Chinese. Though the empire attended the Treaty of Versailles as one of the five great powers, Britain did not renew their alliance, and America was taking notice.

In 1942, Japanese soldiers forced 76,000 prisoners of war to march 106 kilometres. Thousands died, and were killed, along the way

Having spent a generation learning from foreigners, the empire was now building its own rail system and a telephone network. Instead of buying warships from Britain, it started building its own – 600,000 tonnes in 1919 rivalled both American and British production.

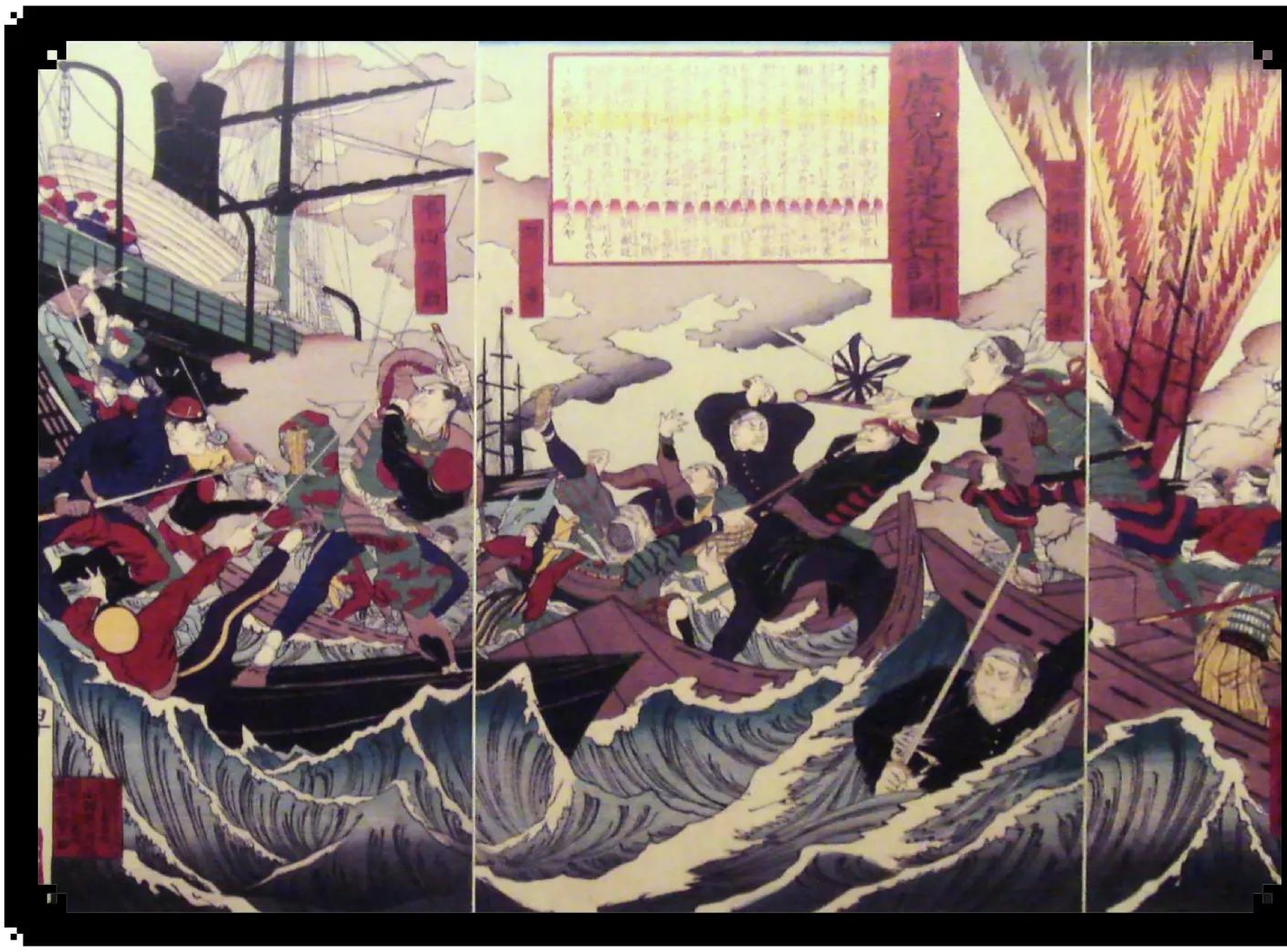
Tokyo was transformed into a modern metropolis, with abundant cinemas, theatres, publishing houses and universities. By the 1930s, even in the most rural areas, 80 per cent of people had lighting – higher than many parts of Western Europe. With its burgeoning expertise, the country was now producing its own machine tools, precision instruments, tanks and trucks, and was the region's kingpin of textiles.

Following the assassination of the prime minister in 1932, the empire was swept up in a wave of militarism and nationalism. The country was tired of the West's anti-Asian immigration policies and trade barriers. Under dubious pretences, Japan invaded and annexed Manchuria. While the army had been just 34,000 strong in 1877, now it boasted hundreds of thousands, and military spending was at an all-time high. Amid growing tensions with America, young officers, newspapers and scholars sensed a war was coming – swearing bloody loyalty to the emperor.

In the militarist society of the 1930s, the samurai martial philosophy of Bushido became a potent symbol

When a border scuffle broke out between Chinese and Japanese troops in 1937, Japan rapidly mounted an invasion of Shanghai. By the end of the year, it had taken Nanjing, the centre of the Chinese nationalist government. In the process, it unleashed unthinkable atrocities on the local civilians – raping and butchering up to 300,000. Japan's campaign in China marked a violent catharsis of deep-seated resentment and newfound hubris. With its war economy dangerously low on resources, the empire invaded French Indochina in 1940. In response, the Americans banned oil exports to Japan.

With just two years of oil reserves left, war was now inevitable. Seeking to decisively take out the US Navy, in 1941, without warning, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor – an enormous assault, involving six



THE SATSUMA REBELLION

Inside the revolt that saw the end of the samurai

The lord of the powerful southern Satsuma clan, Saigō Takamori, was instrumental in the Meiji Restoration. The regime's leading conservative, he advocated an invasion of Korea, even offering to provide casus belli by insulting the Koreans so viciously they killed him. Disgusted with the corruption of politics, he retired to Satsuma in 1873, filling the province with 'Private Schools' – virtual training camps.

Concerned about the region's refusal to adopt imperial reforms, the government sent spies, one of whom confessed under torture that he planned to assassinate Takamori. When an imperial navy crew was caught trying to remove the region's vast arsenal under cloak of night, the samurai rose up in rebellion – behind the leadership of Takamori.

Takamori led an army of 30,000 highly motivated veterans on a march to the capital, all dressed in their imperial uniforms. Despite a promising start, the rebels could not keep up with the imperial army's ability to recruit, fielding 60,000 conscripts. Despite losing 16,000, the imperial army beat back the rebellion, aided by naval gunfire and superior strategy. After a doomed last stand alongside his most loyal men, Takamori committed ritual suicide – with him, the samurai class died, in perhaps the most befitting manner.

fleet carriers and 408 planes. Japan simultaneously attacked Thailand, the Philippines and Malaya, and within months, the 'impregnable' Singapore fell, taking away the British Far East Fleet's base. It went on to take British Borneo, oil-rich Dutch Borneo and various Indonesian islands, securing precious resources and strategic positions. In the Philippines, the Japanese destroyed half of the American air fleet in one hour. By the end of the year, even Hong Kong, Britain's East Asian crown jewel, had fallen.

However, having lost their first carrier at the Battle of the Coral Sea, the Japanese were then defeated at the decisive Battle of Midway, losing four carriers, 2,200 crewmen and 234 planes, along with experienced pilots. After a loss at Guadalcanal, Japan was put on the defensive. Following an incredible start for the Axis, the tide had turned, and after Italy's surrender, momentum shifted in the Allies' favour. When Germany surrendered in 1945, the war came to Japan's shores.

> "Young officers, newspapers and scholars sensed a war was coming"

Virtually every city in Japan was destroyed by firebombs, even before the desperate battle at Okinawa. Fatalistic support for the emperor had reached new heights – kamikaze pilots hurtled their planes into enemy ships, generals committed seppuku (the samurai's ritualised belly cutting) and civilians threw themselves from the cliffs. For the Americans, who lost 49,000 at Okinawa, any victory to be found invading the mainland would certainly be a Pyrrhic one.

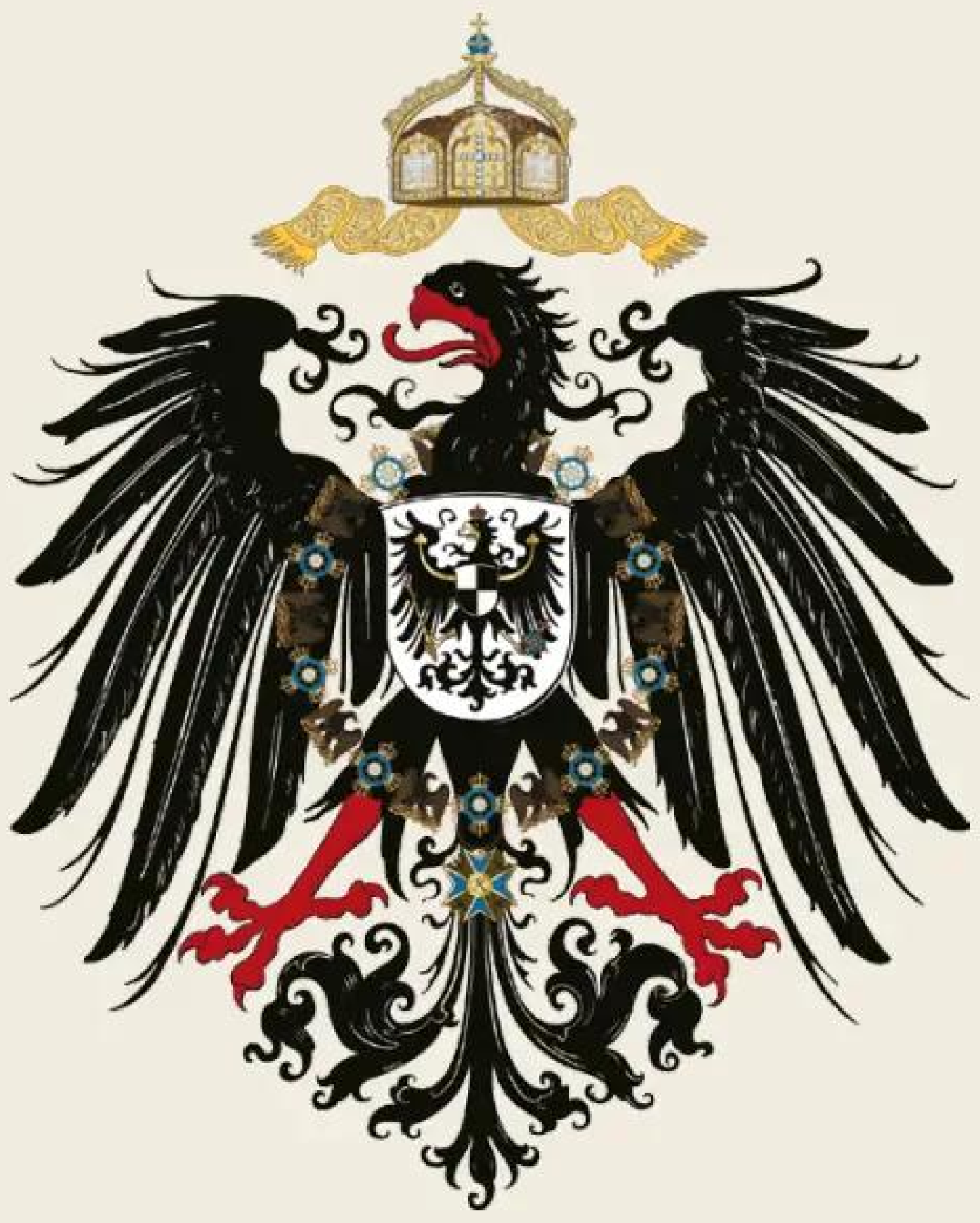
When the emperor refused to surrender, the Americans dropped the first-ever nuclear bomb used in war on Hiroshima, and then another over Nagasaki, killing hundreds of thousands of people instantly, and injuring countless others. Despite continued gusto from some generals, the emperor finally surrendered, putting an end to the country's ambitions for imperial glory forever.

The total defeat Japan suffered in World War II dealt a huge blow to the national psyche. The emperor's mortality had been exposed to an entire generation, who had grown up believing him divine. The country was occupied by the Americans, who introduced a new constitution in 1947, renouncing war.

Though Hirohito was allowed to remain emperor, he was reduced to a symbol of Japanese unity; sovereignty would lie with the National Diet. However, by the time of death in 1989, Japan had become the world's second-largest economy.

Japanese soldiers celebrated their military conquests with rapacious glee, subjecting Chinese civilians to atrocities along the way

© Getty Images



THE GERMAN EMPIRE

Born amid the flames of nationalism, the German Empire upset the fragile balance of power and plunged the world into war

Written by James Hoare

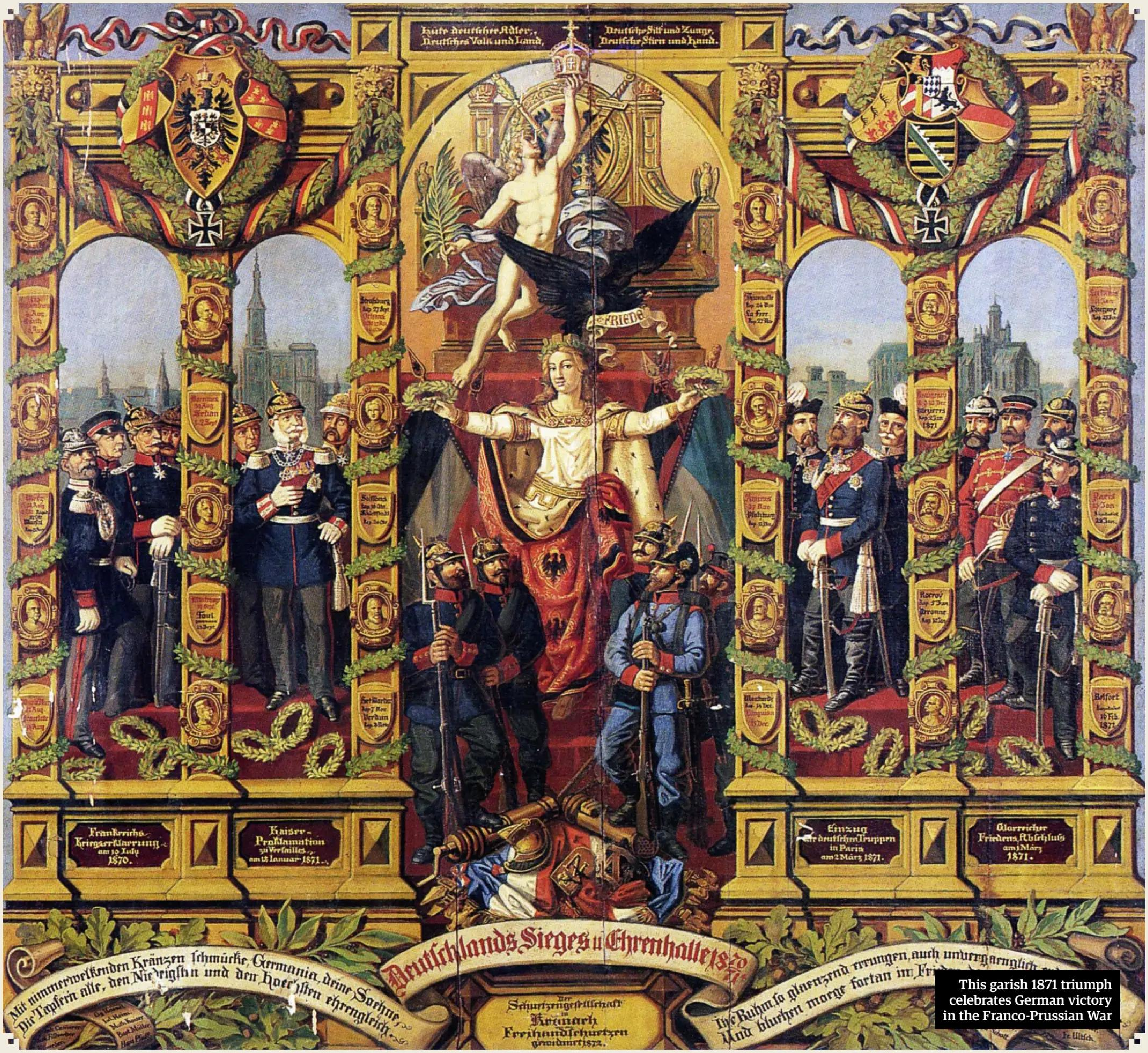
Once a frontier province lying on the fringe of the German-speaking world, in the aftermath of Napoleon's 1815 defeat at Waterloo the kingdom of Prussia emerged as a force to be reckoned with. In the century that followed, a nation would be born and neighbours would be consumed, and Berlin would go to war with Denmark, Austria, France and then, in 1914, the world.

The 1814-15 Congress of Vienna shifted borders and conjured states from whole cloth, transforming the balance of power in Europe. Austria, the old leading light of the German world with its 1,000-year Habsburg dynasty, now ruled over fewer German speakers than the upstart Prussia, while Russia consumed Poland, forcing Prussia's interests away from the east and towards the new German Confederation.

Like the black eagle crest of the ruling Hohenzollern dynasty, Prussia gazed to the west. Berlin hoped to use the German Confederation – in reality little more than a diplomatic talking shop with no executive functions – as the vehicle for Prussian influence. Resisted furiously by Austria, and the smaller states who played the two powers off against each other in order to maintain their own autonomy, Prussia sponsored a customs union, a single military policy and numerous other initiatives in an attempt to bind the German-speaking world to the Hohenzollern throne.

While Berlin's political efforts failed to win over neighbouring governments, it did impress upon ordinary people the kingdom's modernity and commitment to pan-German ideals. These ideological storm shutters held firm as nationalist uprisings spread across the 39 states of the German Confederation in 1848.

Fuelled by dissatisfaction against the autocracy and self-interest of the petty monarchs, many hoped for universal suffrage and a single elected parliament under the benevolent gaze of the Prussian king. The revolutionary Frankfurt Parliament formed in March 1848 drew up a constitution and offered the crown of German emperor, or kaiser, to Frederick William IV. The


Hüte deutſcher Adler, Deutſches Volk und Land,
Deutſche Sitt und Zunge, Deutſcher Sinn und Hand.
FRIEDE
Frankreichs Kriegserklärung am 19 July 1870.
Kaiser-Proklamation zu Versailles am 18 Januar 1871.
Einzug der deutſchen Truppen in Paris am 2 März 1871.
Glorreicher Friedens Abſchluss am 1 März 1871.
Mit nimmerwelkenden Kränzen ſchmücke, Germania, deine Soehne,
Die Tapfern alle, den Niedrigſten und den Hoechſten ehrengleich.
Deutſchlands Sieges u. Ehrenhalle 1870/71.
Der Schützengeſellſchaft in Kreuznach Freihandſchützen gewidmet 1872.
Ihr Ruhm, ſo glaenzend errungen, auch unvergaenglich
Und blühen morge fortan im Fri

This garish 1871 triumph celebrates German victory in the Franco-Prussian War

man who would be more than king, demurred – nervous of provoking intervention from Russia or Austria – and the Frankfurt Parliament collapsed without a unified Germany.

In 1857, a stroke left Frederick William IV unable to rule and he was succeeded by his brother. Wilhelm I gathered around him a number of forceful modernisers who would play a key role in the rise and fall of the German Empire. Wilhelm had been in uniform from six years old and received his first officer commission at the age of nine. This coloured his thinking on unification, writing in 1849 that "whoever wants to govern Germany must conquer it first".

Though 61 on taking the throne, Wilhelm energetically reorganised the Prussian army and consolidated power under his handpicked minister of war, while his newly installed minister-president Otto von Bismarck applied his own strategy of Realpolitik to place Prussia at the heart of Europe.

Realpolitik was the politics of pragmatism, where decisions are made based on opportunity and changing circumstances, and not ideology. In his infamous 1862 speech to the Prussian parliament, Bismarck outlined his commitment to bold action, saying, "The great questions of the time will not be resolved by speeches and majority decisions – that was the great mistake of 1848 and 1849 – but by iron and blood."

Disillusioned by the slow pace of change, the romantic revolutionaries of 1848 gave way to the conservative nationalists of 1862's Realpolitik, and their Germany would be built with iron and blood. As early as 1830, French war scares had been used by Berlin to push for a Prussian-led defence policy, but in 1870 Bismarck went even further than fanning the flames of fear – he began to beat the drums of war.

A convoluted Danish constitutional crisis in 1863 gave him the opportunity he sought. King Frederick VII died without a male heir so the

“Infatuated and infuriated by the British Empire in equal measure, he wanted Germany to be global in ambition”

Danish crown passed through the maternal line, but his junior titles of duke of Schleswig and duke of Holstein were now disputed. The two duchies had German majorities and had seen violent uprising two decades earlier against Danish rule. Sensing opportunity, German nationalists backed a rival claimant.

The German Confederation marched to war led by Austria and Prussia – the former mainly to counterbalance Prussian influence over this rare display of German unity and prevent Schleswig-Holstein from being annexed outright by Berlin.

A 1907 portrait postcard of Wilhelm II

In August 1864, the defeated Danes ended the Second Schleswig War by ceding Schleswig, Holstein and Saxe-Lauenburg to joint Austro-Prussian military occupation, but the two soon came to blows over the final settlement.

Fearing Prussian aggression, the majority of the German states sided with Austria, forcing Prussia to fight on multiple fronts against far greater numbers. A collective lack of will and poor morale from the Austrian army in the face of superior infantry tactics and use of the new Dreyse needle gun by the Prussians ended in total humilition for the Habsburgs. Vienna’s capitulation in July 1866 after only seven weeks of fighting brought about the dissolution of the German Confederation and Prussia put together a North German Confederation that was little more than a Greater Prussia. Prussia was also given carte blanche to annex Schleswig-Holstein and numerous other proudly independent principalities, until eventually Berlin directly ruled over four-fifths of the North German Confederation.

Four years later, the Confederation went to war with France. Fearing encirclement by potential foes, Paris had vetoed the installation of a Hohenzollern prince on the troubled Spanish throne and Bismarck released a subtly edited version of Wilhelm I’s rebuke to the outraged French press, making the king sound more bellicose than he actually was. Emperor Napoleon III, keen to restore French prestige and facing the bared teeth of public opinion, declared war in July 1870.

Six months later, Prussian hooves marched through the streets of Paris in victory. The border region of Alsace-Lorraine was annexed, a 5-billion-franc indemnity was to be paid by the defeated France, and the German Empire – or Reich – was declared in the Palace of Versailles’s Hall of Mirrors. Paris would never forget the loss of Alsace-Lorraine in the Franco-Prussian War and, recognising that a strong Germany represented a threat to their very existence, began to seek allies in Russia.

Chancellor Otto von Bismarck in military garb with the iconic spiked pickelhaube

The Imperial Constitution of 1870 that birthed the German Empire was a compromised affair. Bismarck – now Germany’s first chancellor – and Wilhelm I clashed over numerous points, with the former limiting the kaiser’s power with an elected federal assembly and a preamble that made Wilhelm merely ‘German kaiser’ as opposed to ‘kaiser of Germany’ – a wording that suggested limited authority.

Devolved governments of the kingdoms of Bavaria and Wurttemberg, and the Grand Duchies of Baden and Hesse continued to raise their own armies, pass their own laws, operate their own parliaments and collect their own taxes, and the increasingly aging Wilhelm I kept to his Prussian heartland. Finding it impossible to assert himself

1 January 1834

German Customs Union

Prussia successfully forms the German Customs Union (Zollverein) in face of a rival Austrian-sponsored scheme. It’s the first truly pan-German initiative.

1 May 1848

Frankfurt Parliament

Following nationalist uprisings across Germany a short-lived national assembly is formed, offering the role of kaiser to Frederick William IV.

1 February – 30 October 1864

Second Schleswig War

Austria and Prussia go to war with Denmark over German-majority provinces in Jutland. Despite poor Prussian performance, they are victorious.

14 June – 26 July 1866

Austrian-Prussian War

Allies turn on each other over Schleswig-Holstein. Austria capitulates and Prussia forms the North German Confederation of client states.

against the domineering chancellor, he made few public appearances and lived a relatively quiet life until he passed away in 1888.

His son Frederick III might have been an altogether different monarch. A charismatic liberal married to Queen Victoria's eldest daughter, also called Victoria, he perhaps might have been the first great German emperor, but by the time he came to throne, he was already dying from throat cancer and lasted for three only months.

Wilhelm II became the third - and final - kaiser the same year as his father and grandfather's death. With Frederick III's gift for working a crowd but little of his progressive tendencies, he commanded public attention with his stage-managed pomp and appalled both the international community and the German public with his unpredictable utterances and boorishness. His authoritarian streak ran headlong into Bismarck's and the chancellor was forced from office in 1890, ending 28 years of careful command from Berlin.

Bismarck's calculating Realpolitik had made the German Empire unpopular in some quarters, but it had admirers too - especially in Britain - and the chancellor had carefully maintained the balance of power, concentrating on building a strong, conservative German state. Wilhelm II, however, tossed Realpolitik into the fire and replaced it with Weltpolitik.

Infatuated and infuriated by the British Empire in equal measure, he wanted Germany to be global in ambition. He sponsored a strong Imperial German Navy (Kaiserliche Marine) that provoked a battleship construction race with Great Britain, attempted to drive a wedge between old rivals Britain and France in Africa, and between Russia and its western allies, but came away the loser in all three projects.

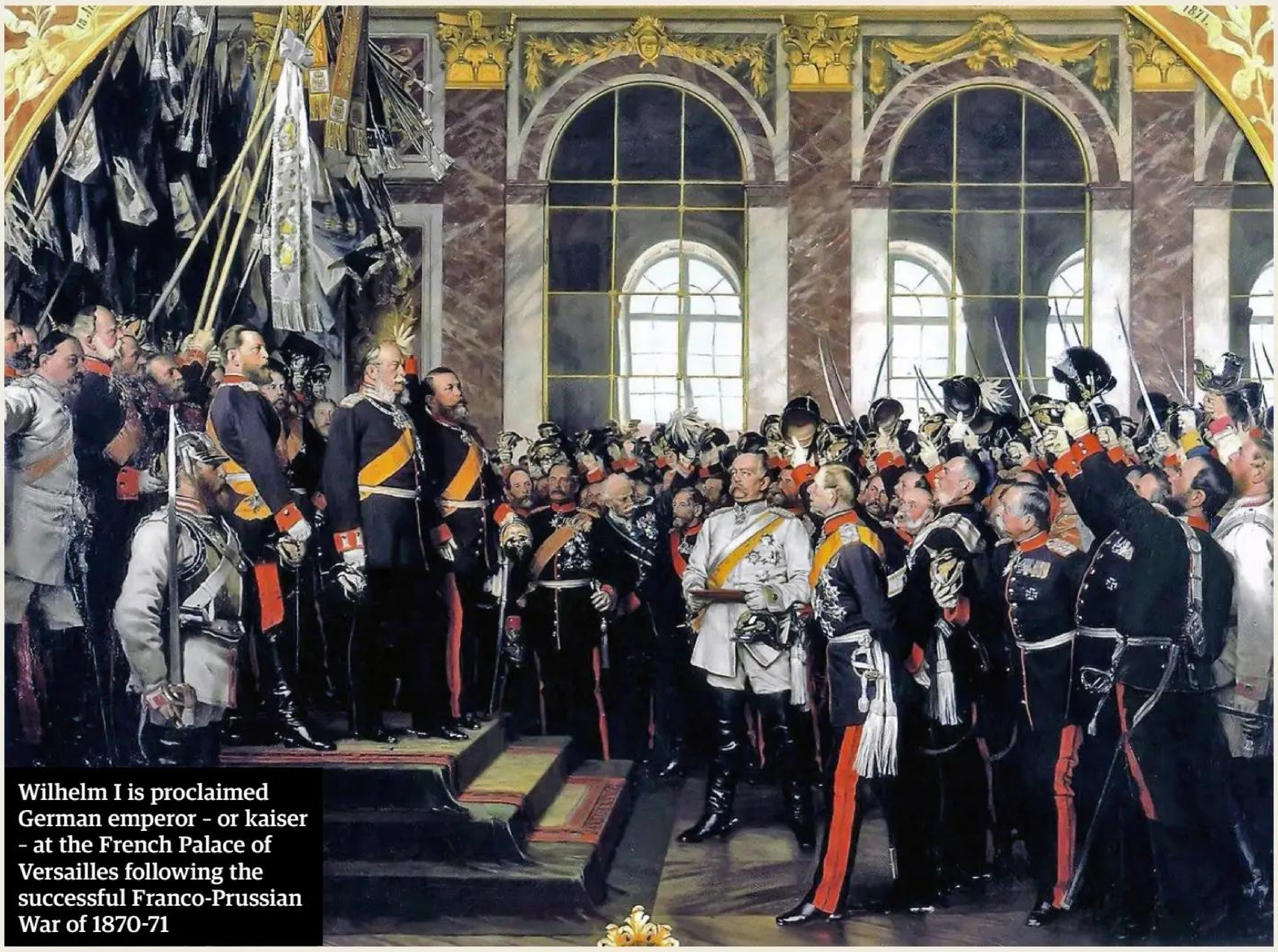
Indeed, Wilhelm II's unpredictable and aggressive interventions succeeded in binding together the unlikely Triple Entente - autocratic and despotic Russia, republican France, and the constitutional monarchy of Great Britain. Where he was successful was repairing the relationship with Vienna and striking up a new one with Istanbul, building lasting alliances with the sclerotic Austro-Hungarian Empire and the waning Ottoman Empire.

He also made good on his global ambitions, building an overseas empire third in surface area after Britain and France. These far-flung domains included German South West Africa and German New Guinea (both from 1884), German East Africa (from 1891), German West Africa (from 1896), German Samoa (from 1899), and three leased 'treaty ports' in China (including Tsingtao, in which they left a brewery by way of legacy).

Wilhelm II's unpredictable foreign policy in the wake of Otto von Bismarck's restraint seemingly validated fears of German expansionism and aggression, polarising the world into two opposing blocs who entered into a collision course over the summer of 1914. The German Empire, built by a century of reformers, warriors, kaisers and kings, would not survive the Great War of 1914-1918, but the single German nation - its greatest achievement - would.

FRIEDR. WILHELM IV KOENIG V. PREUSSEN
A
XXX EIN PFUND FEIN
EIN VEREINSTHALER
1860

An 1860 coin shows the bust of Frederick William IV of Prussia, the king who was nearly a kaiser

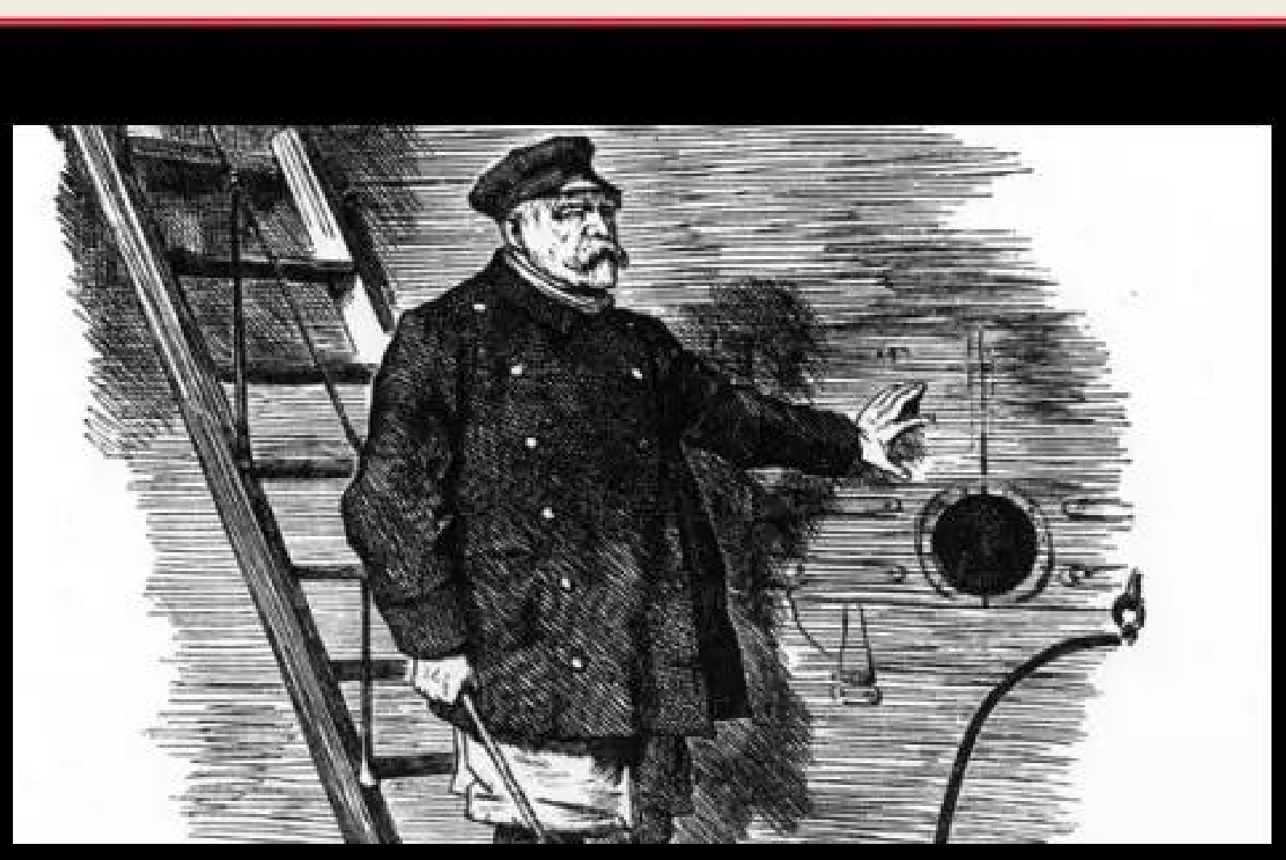


Wilhelm I is proclaimed German emperor - or kaiser - at the French Palace of Versailles following the successful Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71

19 July 1870 – 28 January 1871

Franco-Prussian War

Old rivalry becomes bitter hatred as the North German Confederation occupies Paris and annexes Alsace-Lorraine. The German Empire is proclaimed.



18 March 1890

Bismarck dismissed

After clashing with Kaiser Wilhelm II, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck is manoeuvred from office, ushering in an aggressive new era.

28 July 1914 – 11 November 1918

The Great War

Wilhelm II pushes Austria-Hungary into declaring war on Serbia, prompting the Triple Entente to declare war on the Central Powers.

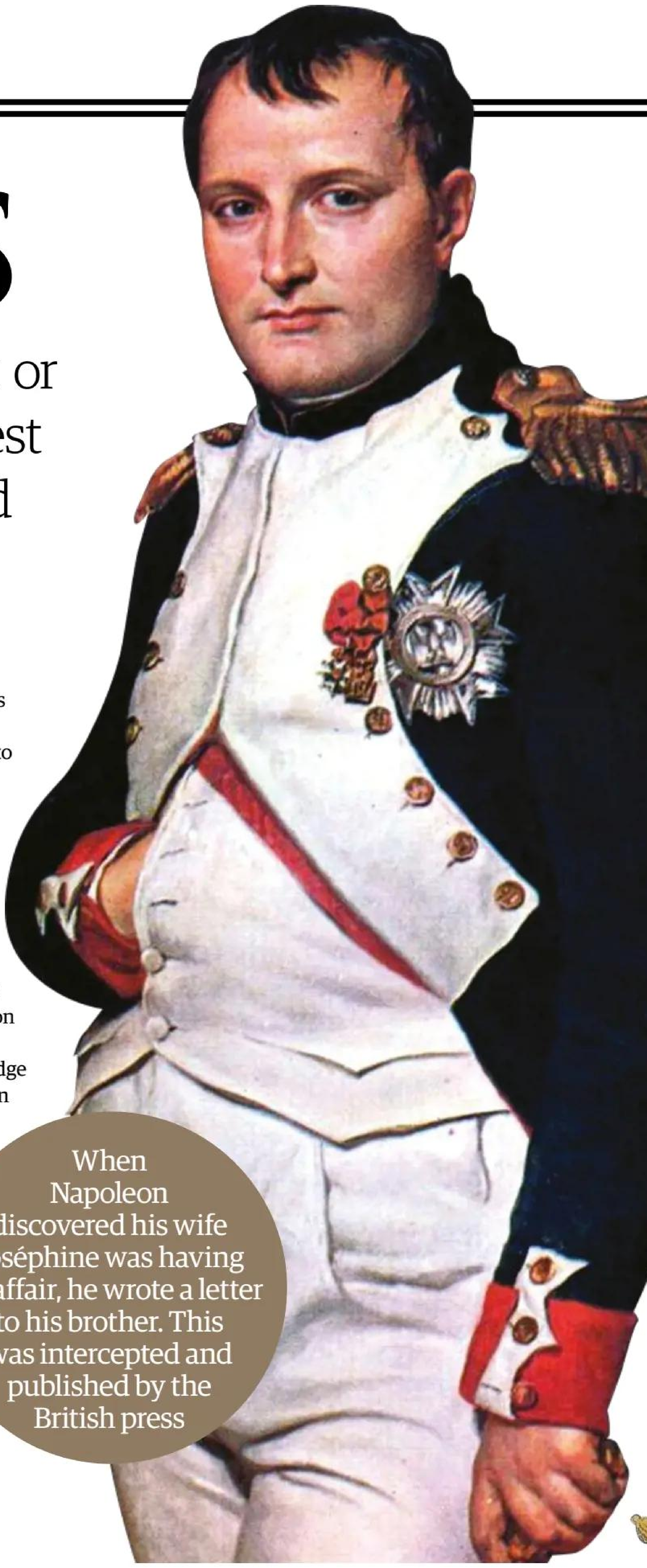
28 June 1919

The Treaty of Versailles

Versailles signalled the end of the German Empire as Alsace-Lorraine was returned to France and other territories were carved off.

EMPIRE DESTROYERS

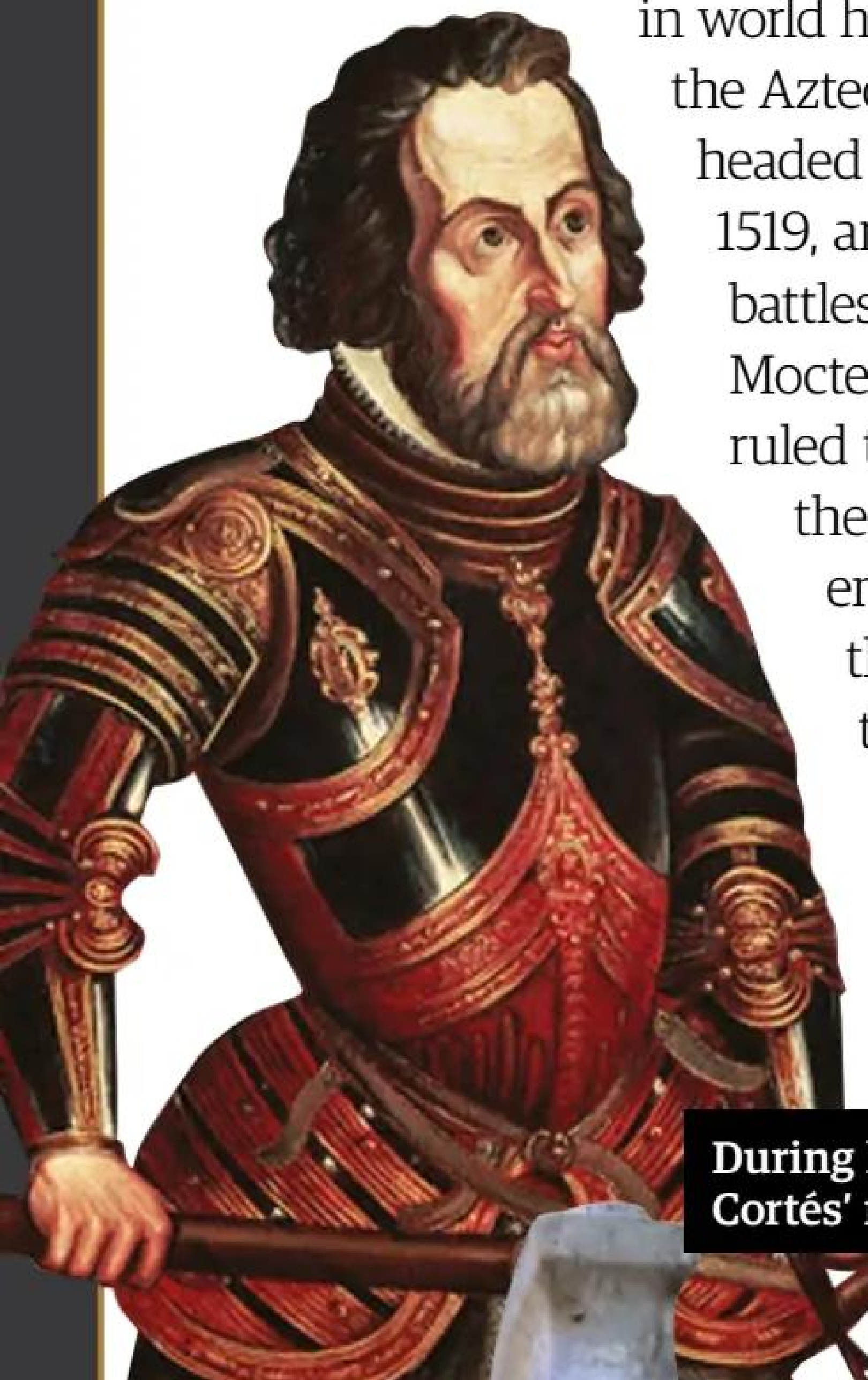
Meet the figures who, through their military might or courageous rebellions, toppled some of the mightiest empires and forever altered the history of the world



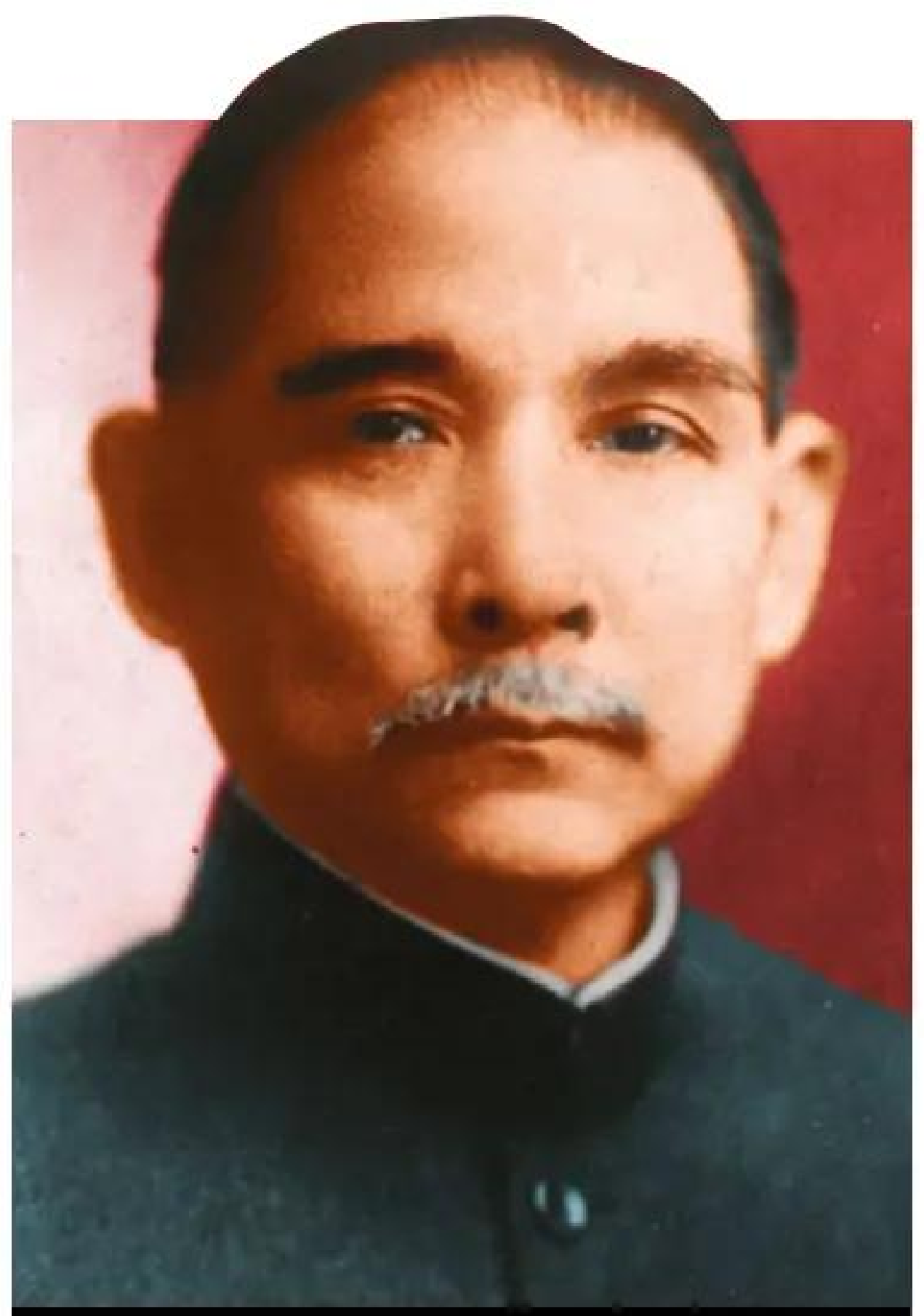
HERNÁN CORTÉS

CASTILIAN 1485-1547

Little is known of the personality of Hernán Cortés, and he has been labelled a hero of the Spanish people, as well as a demon who wrought death and destruction. However he is viewed, he is responsible for one of the most significant events in world history – the conquest of the Aztec Empire. The campaign, headed by Cortés, began in 1519, and after eight months of battles, Cortés took Emperor Moctezuma II captive and ruled through him. When the Aztecs rebelled, the emperor was killed and the resulting siege led to the capture of the capital city of Tenochtitlan in 1521 and the fall of the Aztec Empire.



During his military career, Cortés' nickname was 'Killer'



Although he is now a well-loved figure, Sun received a fair amount of criticism during his lifetime

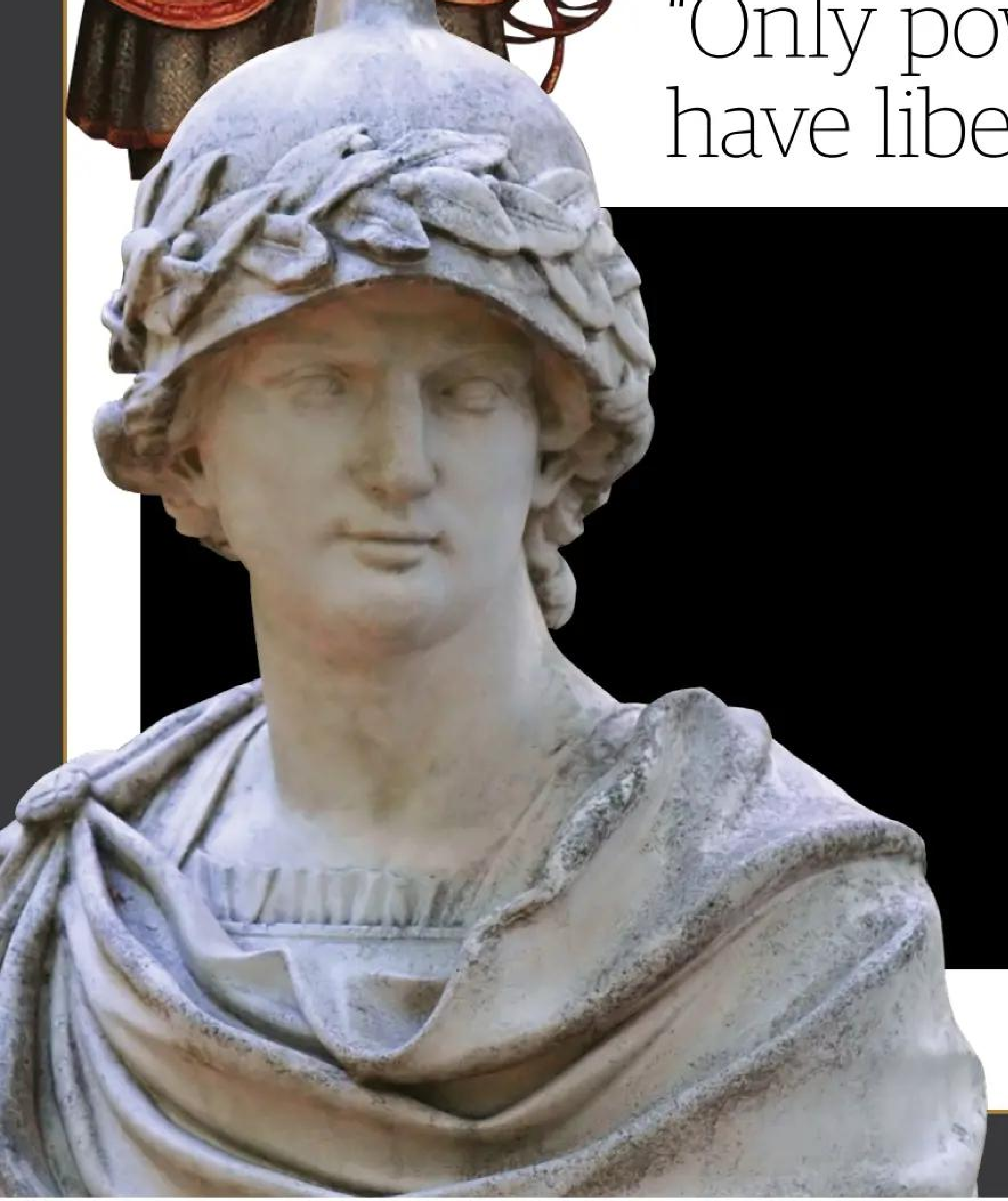
SUN YAT-SEN

CHINESE 1866-1925

For thousands of years the Chinese Empire passed from dynasty to dynasty, but it wasn't until 1912 that the imperial giant was finally brought to its knees. Sun Yat-sen, an intelligent and headstrong young man, grew discontented with the Qing dynasty's aversion to the technological advances and knowledge of the Western modern world, so he developed a plan to overthrow the dynasty. He soon found himself in revolutionary activity and in 1911 he led the Xinhai Revolution, a series of violent revolts and uprisings around the whole empire that eventually forced the six-year-old Emperor Puyi off the throne and established the Republic of China. Today Sun is a hugely revered figure in China, referred to as the 'Father of the Nation'.

When Napoleon discovered his wife Joséphine was having an affair, he wrote a letter to his brother. This was intercepted and published by the British press

> "Only powerful people have liberty" Sun Yat-sen



ALEXANDER THE GREAT

MACEDONIAN 356-323 BCE

The Achaemenid or Persian Empire was founded by Cyrus the Great in the 6th century BCE, and for hundreds of years it grew in size, eventually adding Egypt to its territories. Although ruled by a king, power was delegated to local governments, and it was this disunity in the empire that allowed Alexander the Great to ride in and snatch it. Seeking to reach the "ends of the world", the ambitious youth defeated the Persian army at Granicus, Issus and again at the dramatic

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

FRENCH 1769-1821

Comprising a collection of smaller kingdoms and created in an effort to revive the Western Empire of Rome, the Holy Roman Empire managed to survive for over a thousand years before it finally fell. After the French Revolutionary Wars, nationalism swept over France, and with the strength of their new leader, Napoleon, they finally had the power to realise their lofty ambitions of expansion. Napoleon set his sights on throwing Holy Roman Emperor Francis II off his throne. At the Battle of Austerlitz in 1806, the Holy Roman Empire was crushed by a powerful French force, and Francis II was forced to abdicate, setting the stage for French domination of Europe during the 19th century.

PATRICE LUMUMBA

CONGOLESE 1925-1961

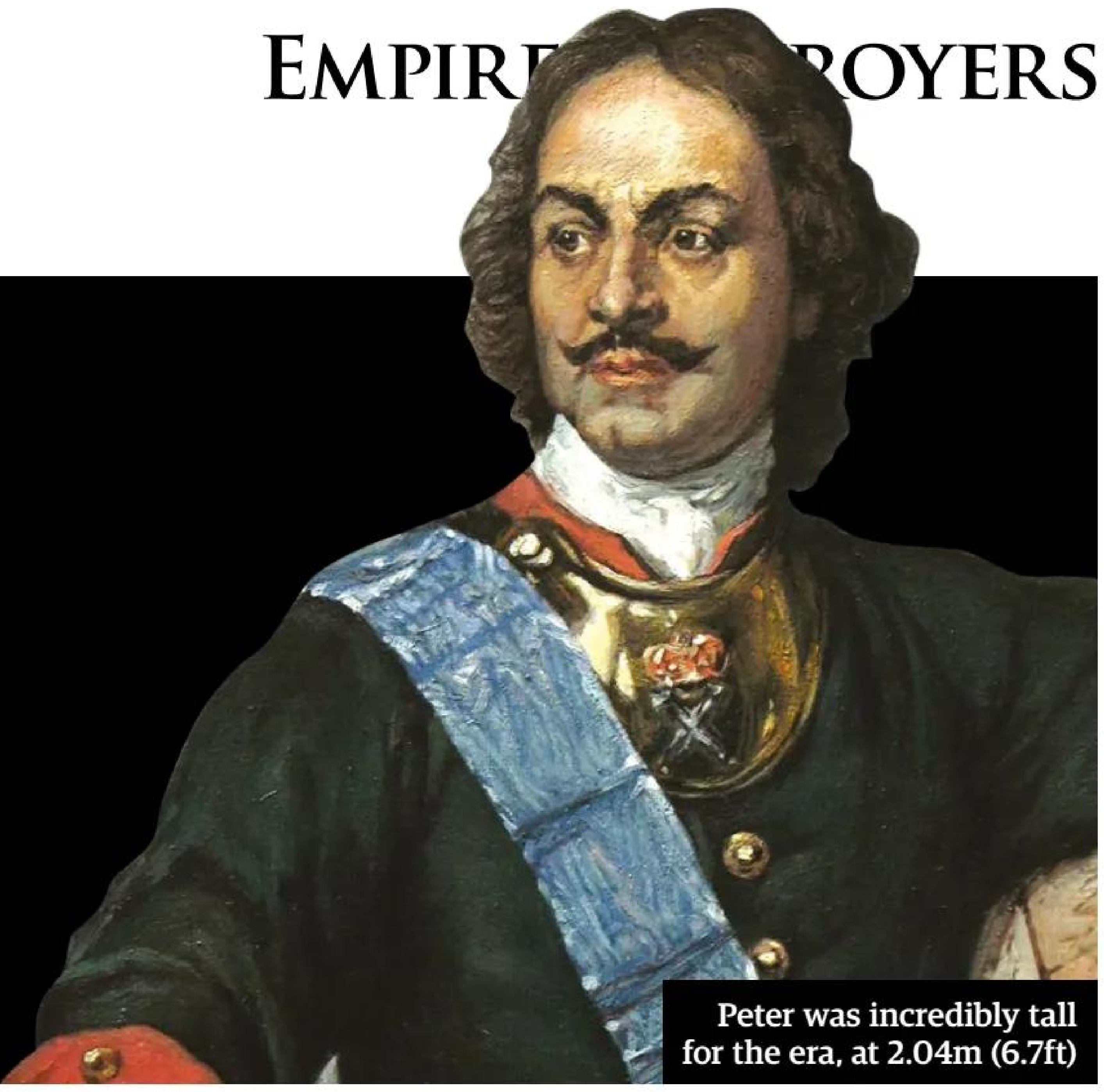
The Belgian colonial empire was unusual in that approximately 98 per cent of it comprised of just one colony – the Belgian Congo. After years of brutal rule, in 1960 a pro-independence movement spread across the colony. The head of the movement, Patrice Lumumba, led a successful revolution and established independence, stripping Belgium of its largest and most profitable colony. Lumumba was elected as prime minister, but after 12 weeks his government was overthrown in a coup and Lumumba was executed.

There is still much mystery surrounding Lumumba's death, with the USA, UK and Belgium all accused of having been involved in it

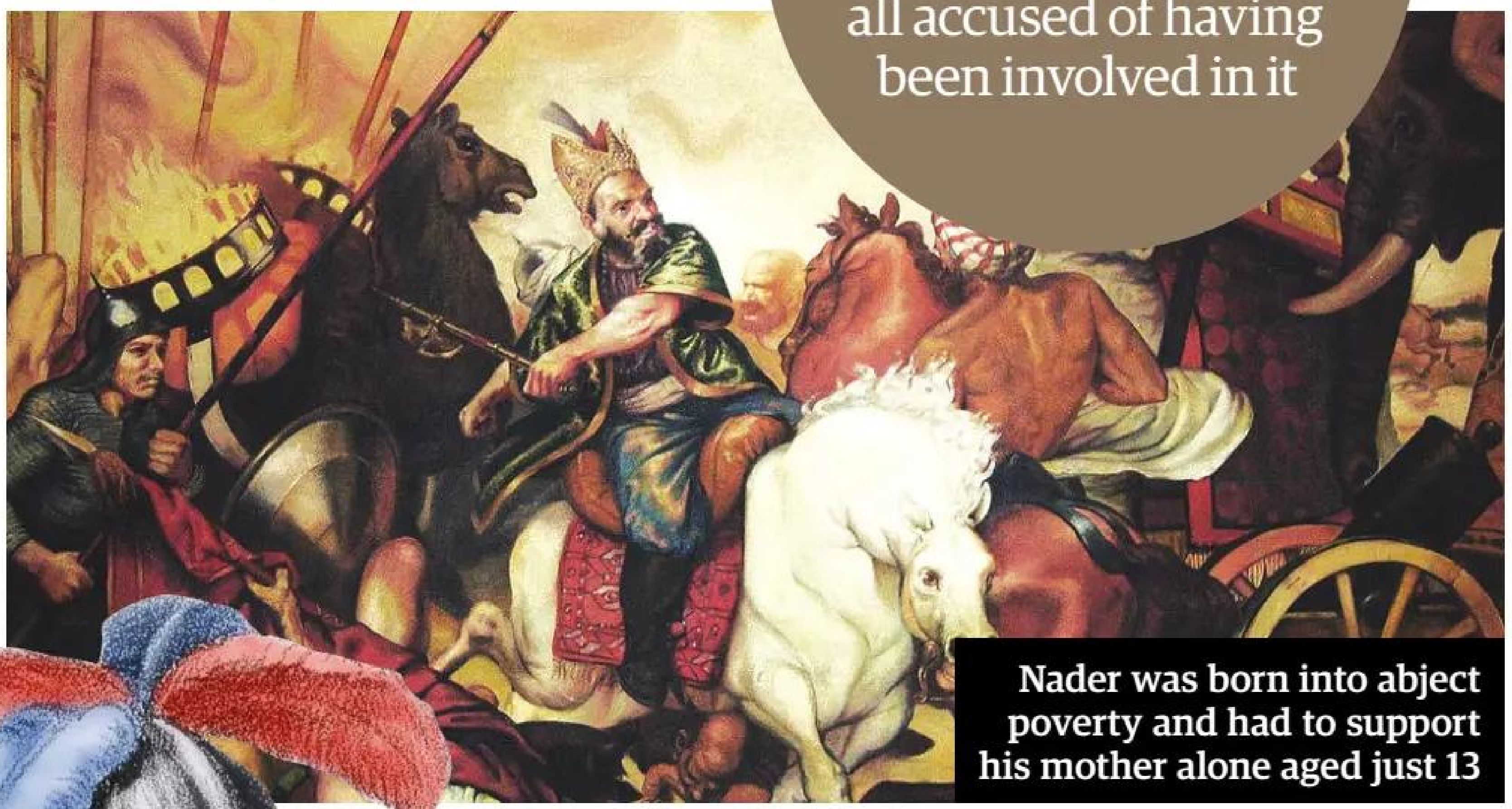
PETER THE GREAT

RUSSIAN 1672-1725

In the 17th and early 18th century, the Swedish Empire enjoyed a period of great power, with land from modern-day USA to Denmark and Finland. However, a new power loomed on the horizon: the Russian Empire led by Peter the Great. The two forces clashed at the Battle of Poltava,



Peter was incredibly tall for the era, at 2.04m (6.7ft)

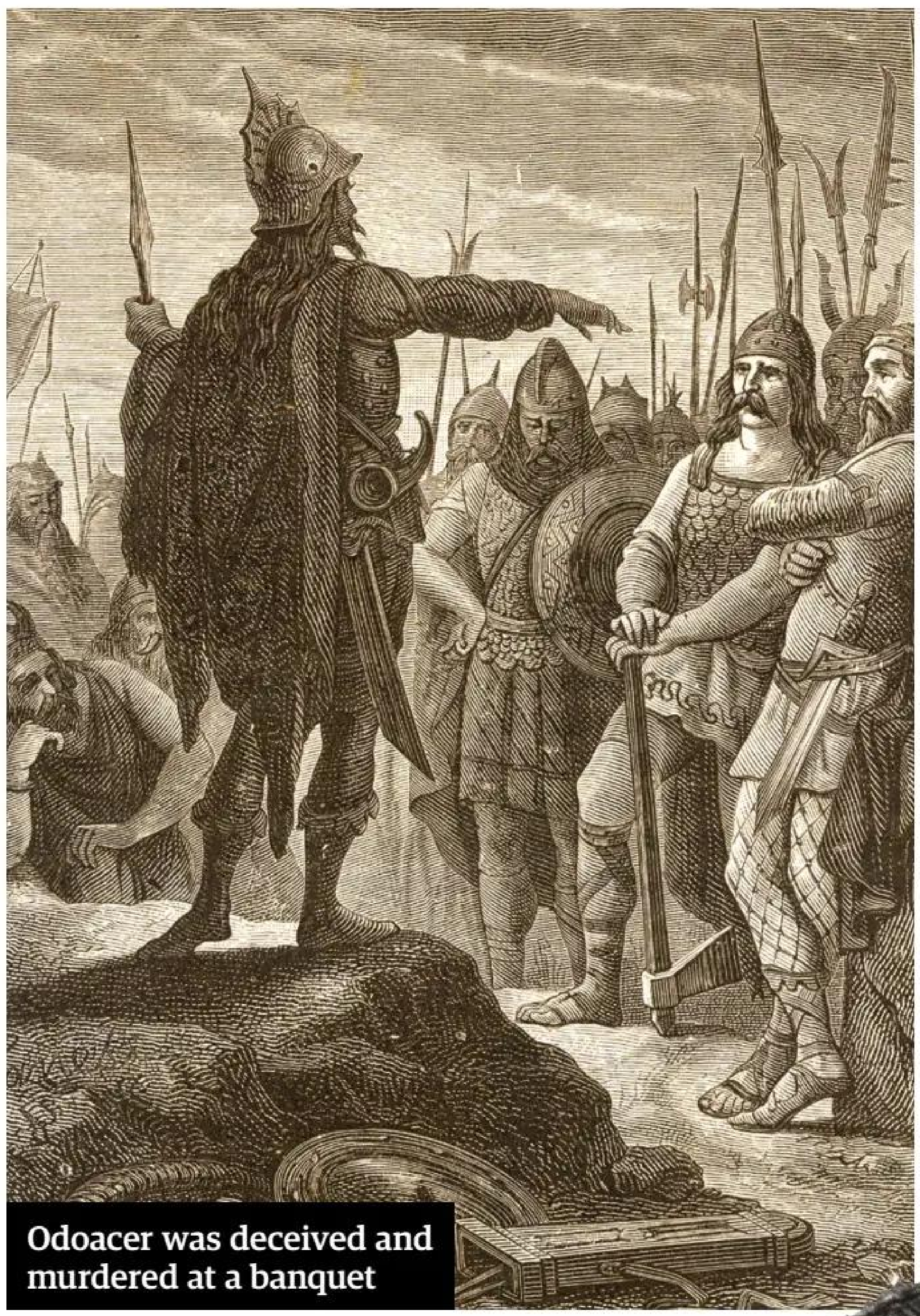


Nader was born into abject poverty and had to support his mother alone aged just 13

NADER SHAH

IRANIAN 1688-1747

Known as 'Napoleon of Persia', Nader Shah led powerful and vicious conquests. He first rebelled against the Safavid dynasty, which had been rulers of Iran since 1502, deposing the leaders in 1736 and proclaiming himself Shah. With his new power he led an invasion of the Mughal Empire of India and defeated them at the Battle of Karnal, sacking and looting the capital. This defeat was one the Mughal Empire was unable to recover from, and afterwards the ritish claimed the little land that remained.

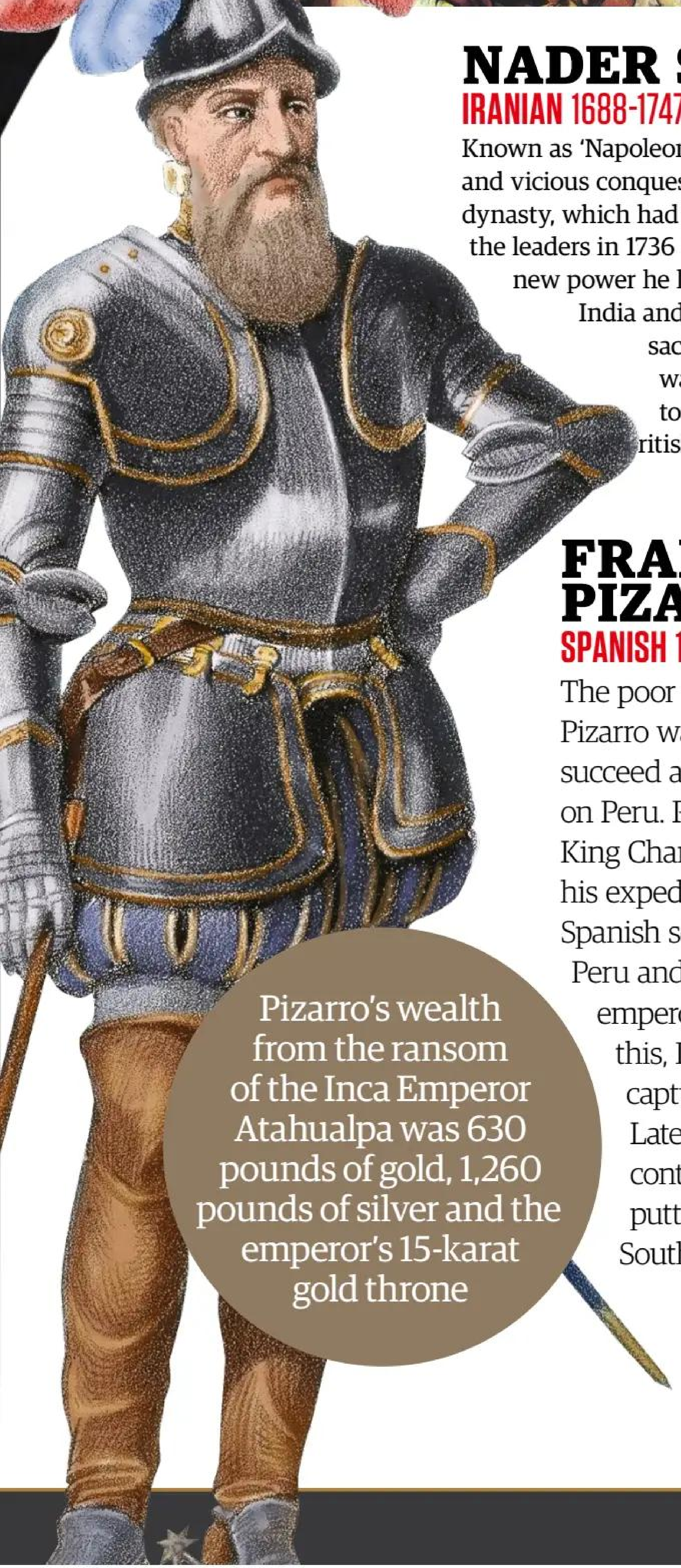


Odoacer was deceived and murdered at a banquet

ODOACER

GERMANIC 433-493

Odoacer was responsible for the destruction of one of the most powerful empires of all time – the Roman Empire. Although its power had slowly been eroded by civil wars and economic depression, it was the revolution led by Odoacer that marked the end of the Western Empire. In 470 Odoacer, a Roman army officer, demanded that Orestes, the head of the Germanic foederati of Italy, reward the army for their services by granting them lands in Italy. When he refused, Odoacer and his men killed Orestes and proceeded to capture the city of Ravenna and depose Emperor Romulus Augustus. Odoacer conquered the rest of Italy and was crowned as the first king of Italy. The Western Roman Empire never recovered from his deathblow.



FRANCISCO PIZARRO

SPANISH 1471-1541

The poor and illiterate Pizarro was driven to succeed and set his sights on Peru. Pizarro persuaded King Charles I to fund his expedition. He set up Spanish settlements in Peru and when the Inca emperor protested against this, Pizarro had him captured and executed. Later that year he took control of the capital, putting an end to the South American empire.

Pizarro's wealth from the ransom of the Inca Emperor Atahualpa was 630 pounds of gold, 1,260 pounds of silver and the emperor's 15-karat gold throne

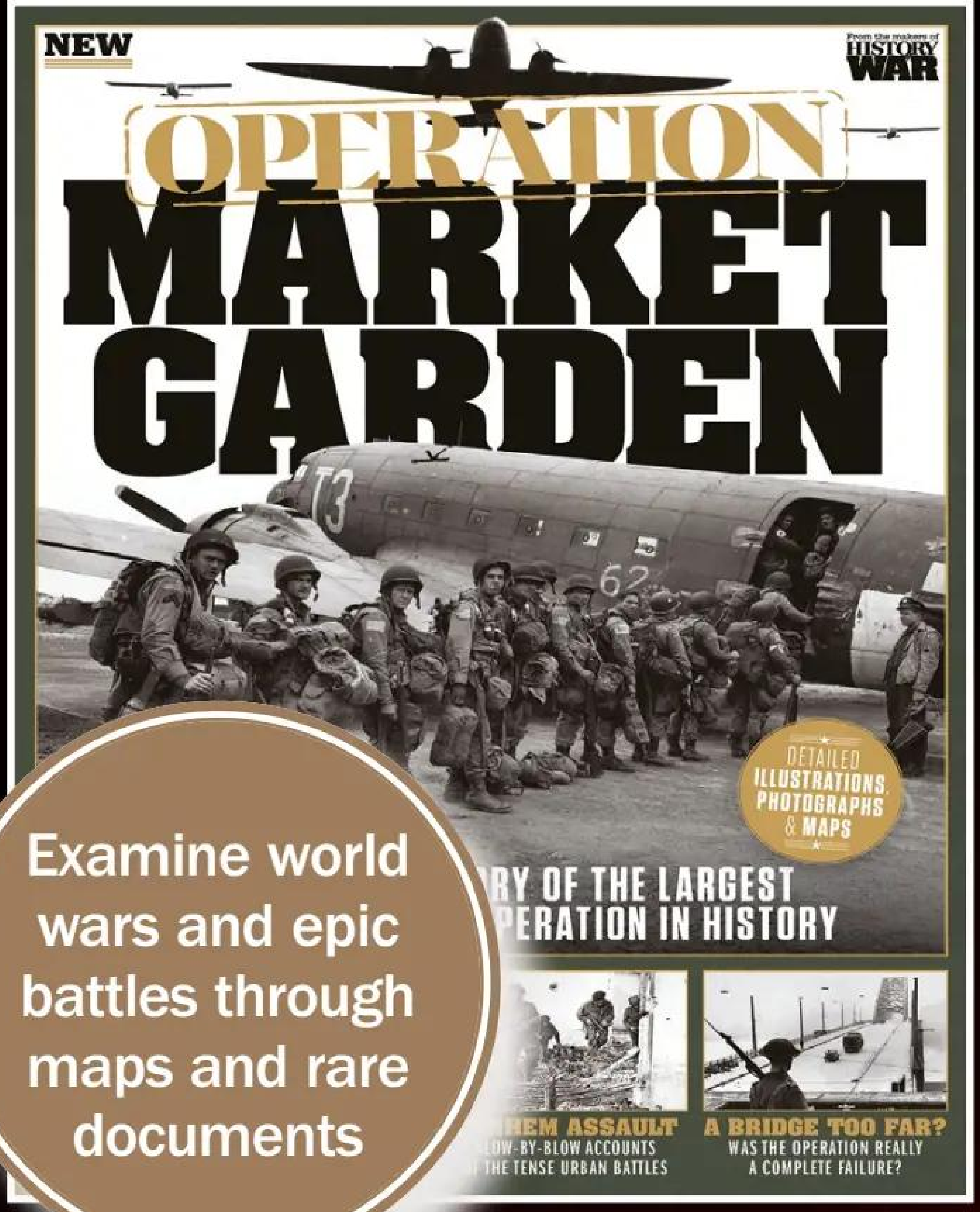
OTELO SARAIVA DE CARVALHO

PORTUGUESE 1936-PRESENT

Serving as a captain in the colonial wars in Africa, Carvalho joined Portuguese rebels. Discontent with military reforms, Carvalho became the chief strategist of the Carnation Revolution. Named for the flowers that were placed in the muzzles of rifles, the Carnation Revolution was a near-bloodless coup that put an end to the dictatorship and led to the end of the Portuguese Empire – with declarations of free speech, release of political prisoners and independence of overseas territories.

When Portugal went bankrupt in 2011, Carvalho said he never would have led the revolution if he had known what the country would become

© Alamy; Corbis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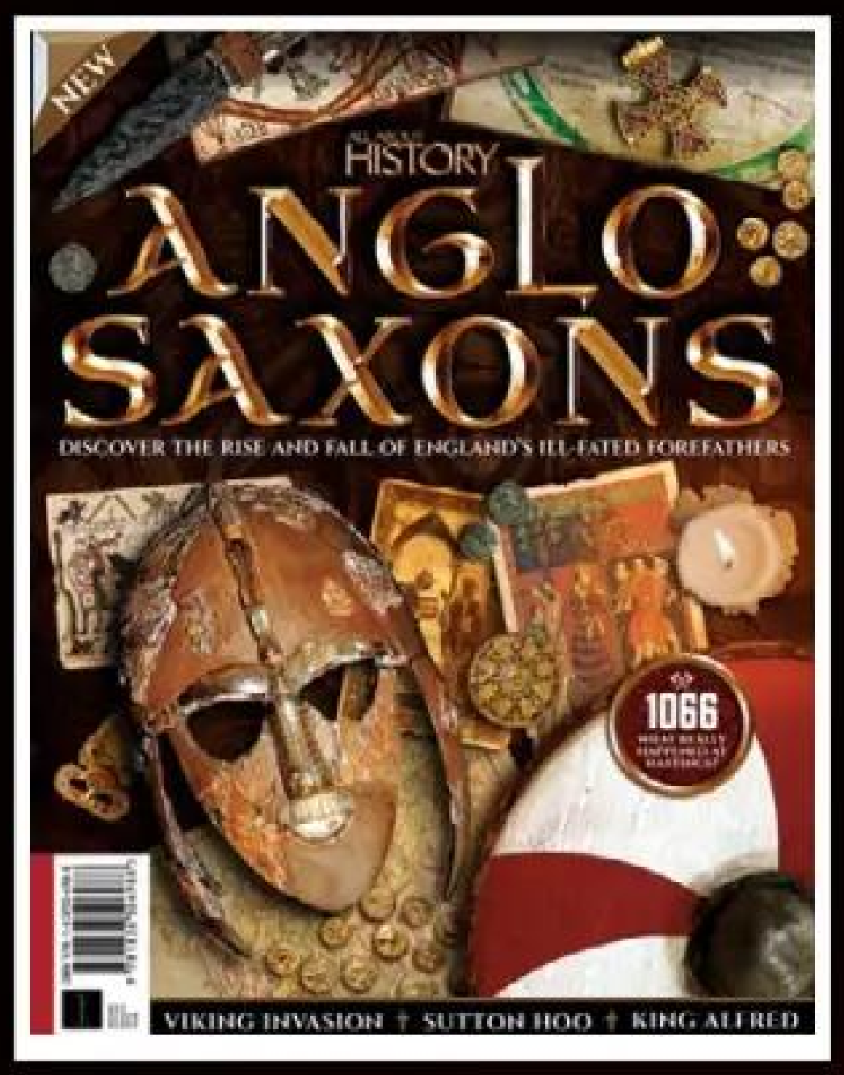
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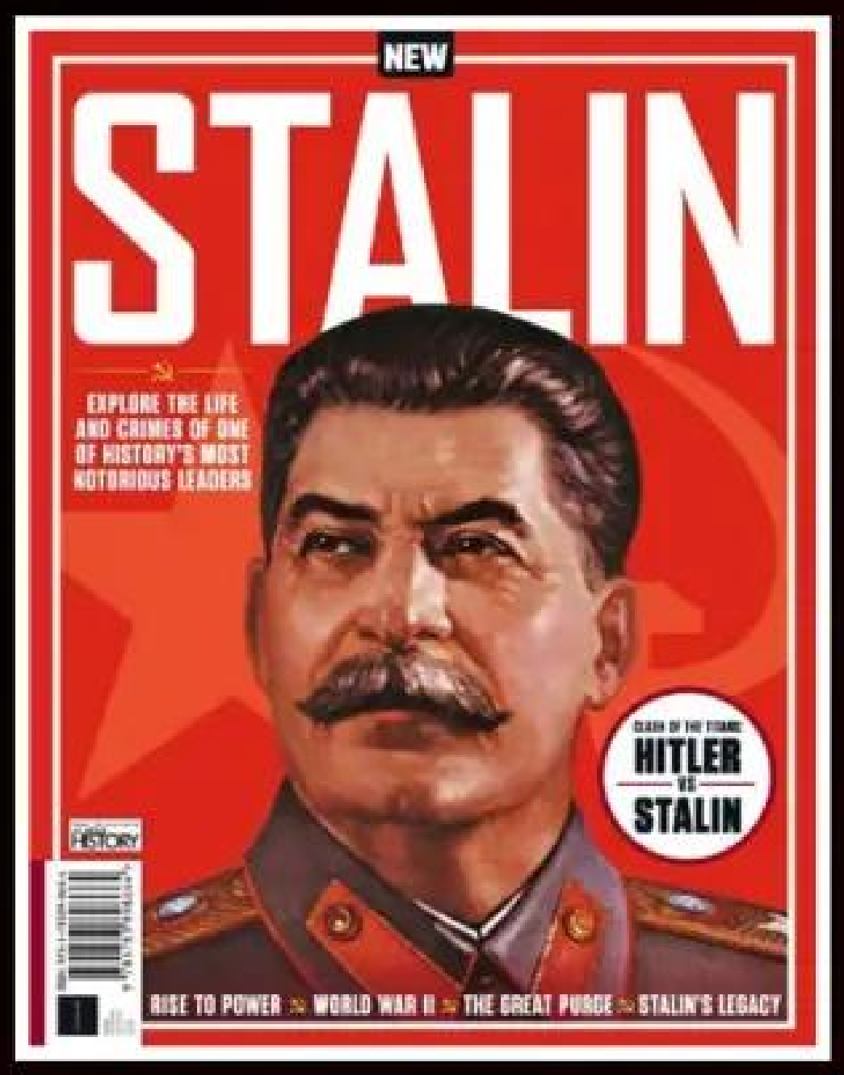

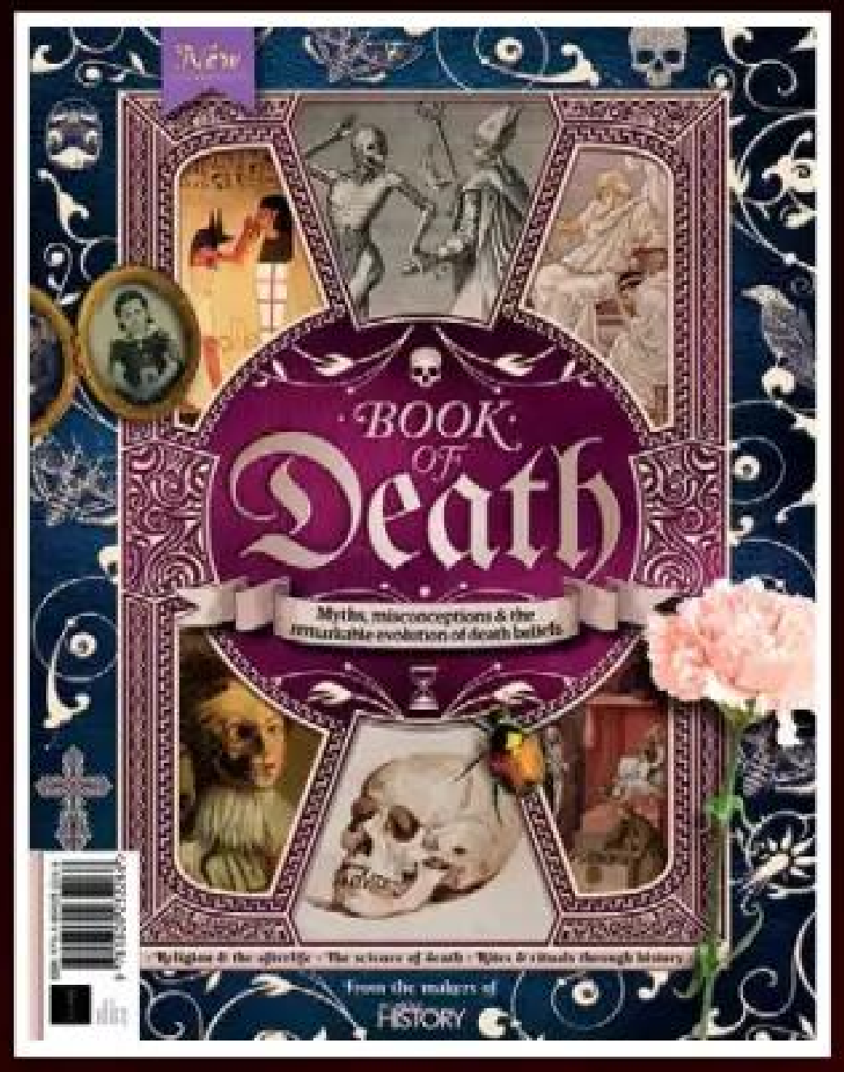
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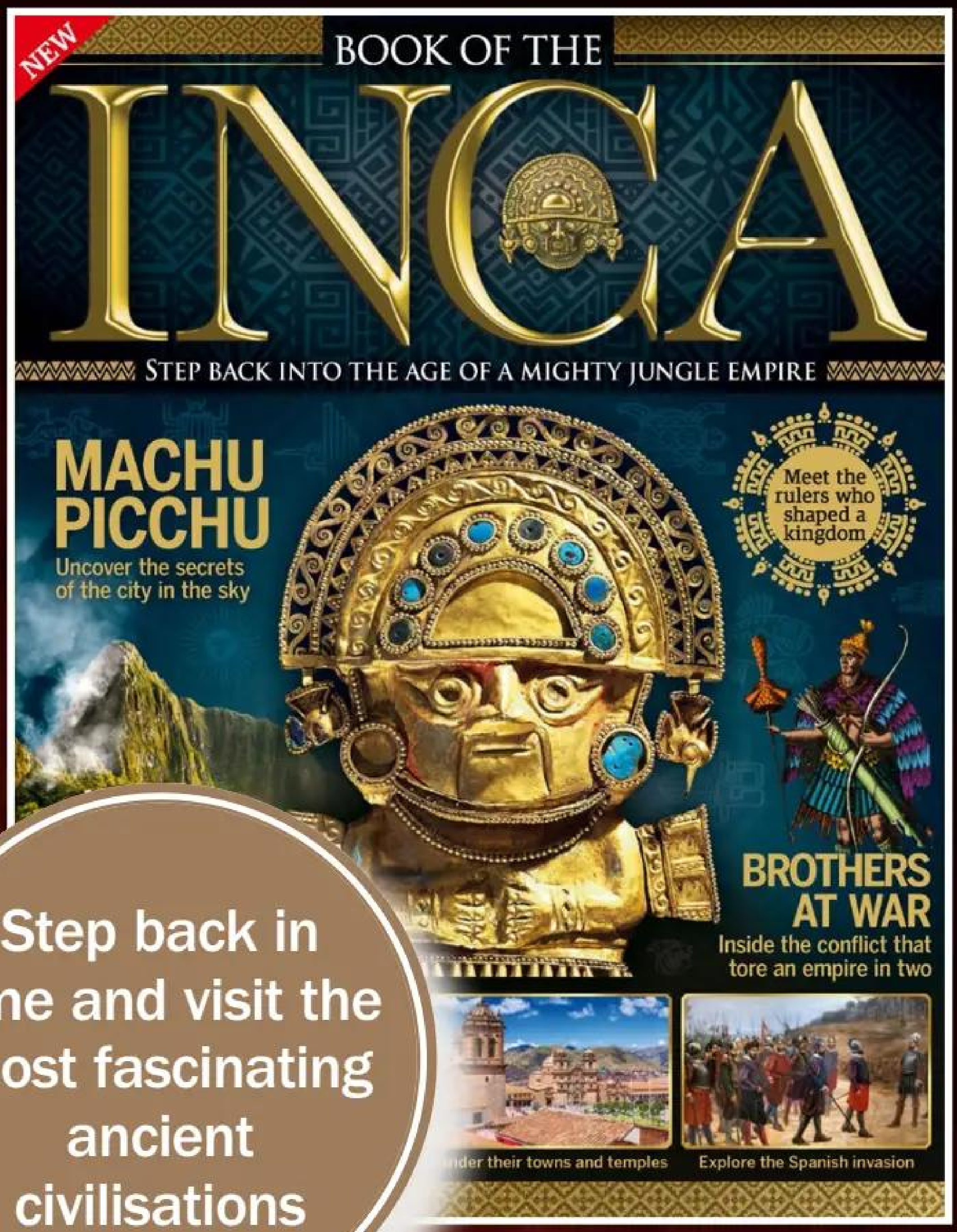
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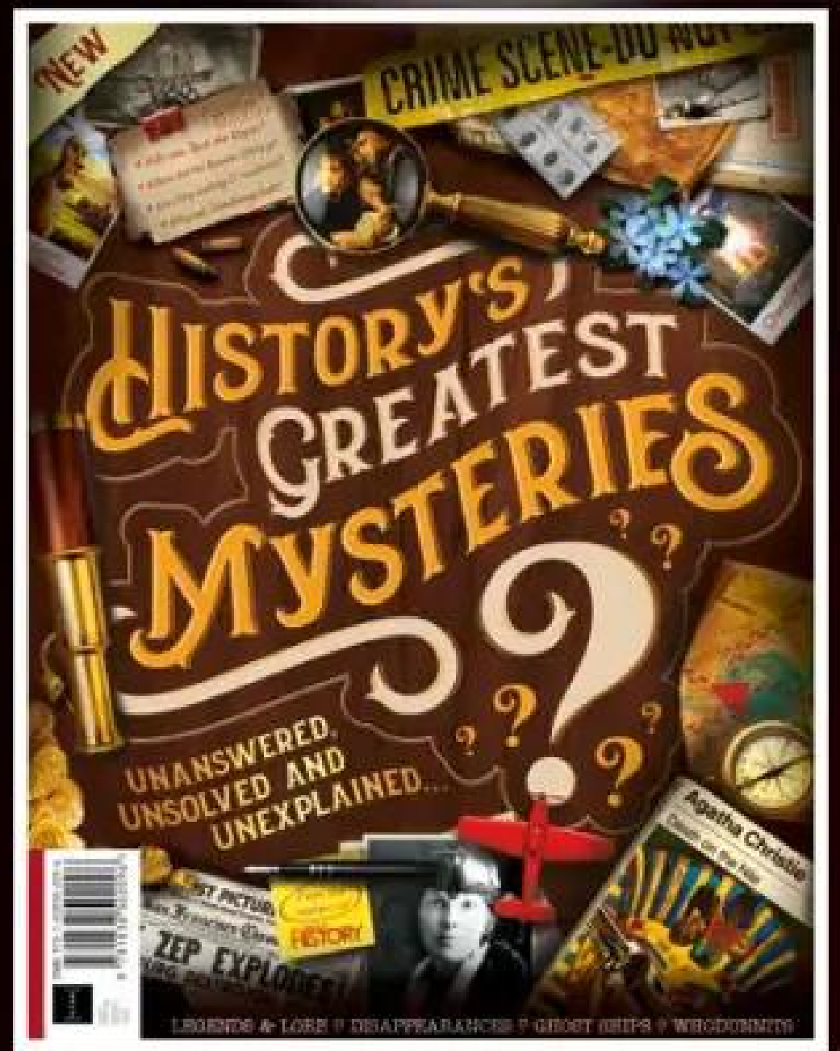
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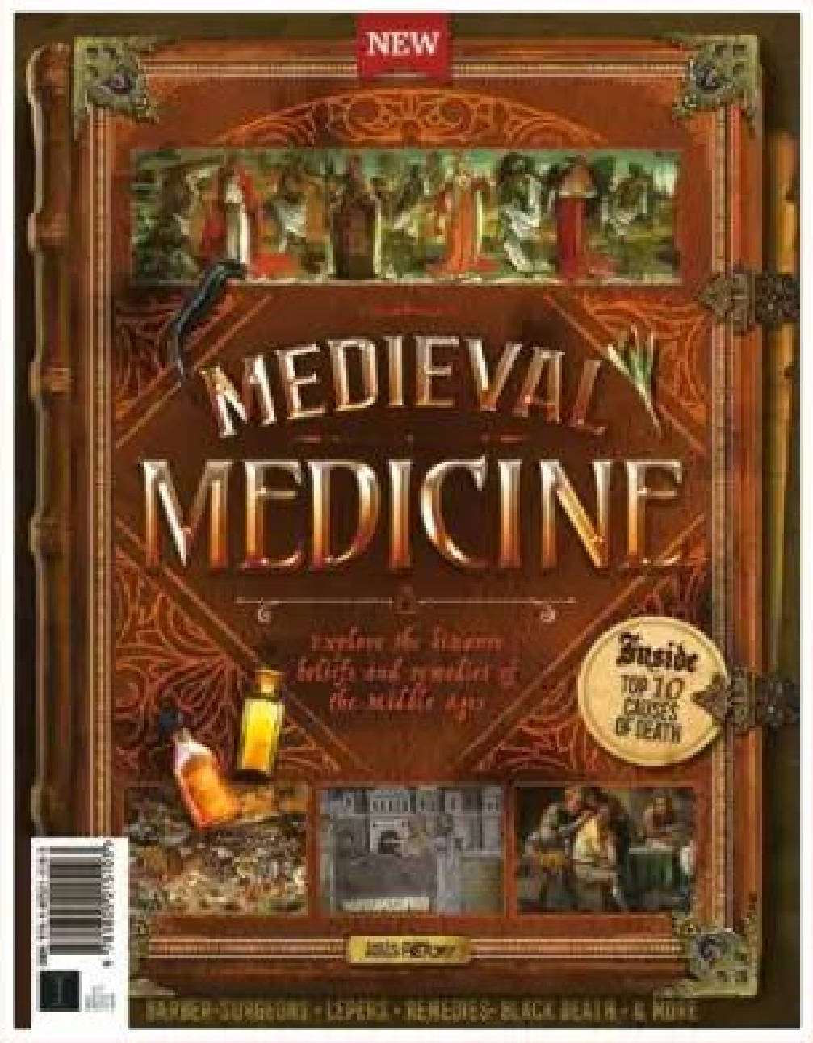
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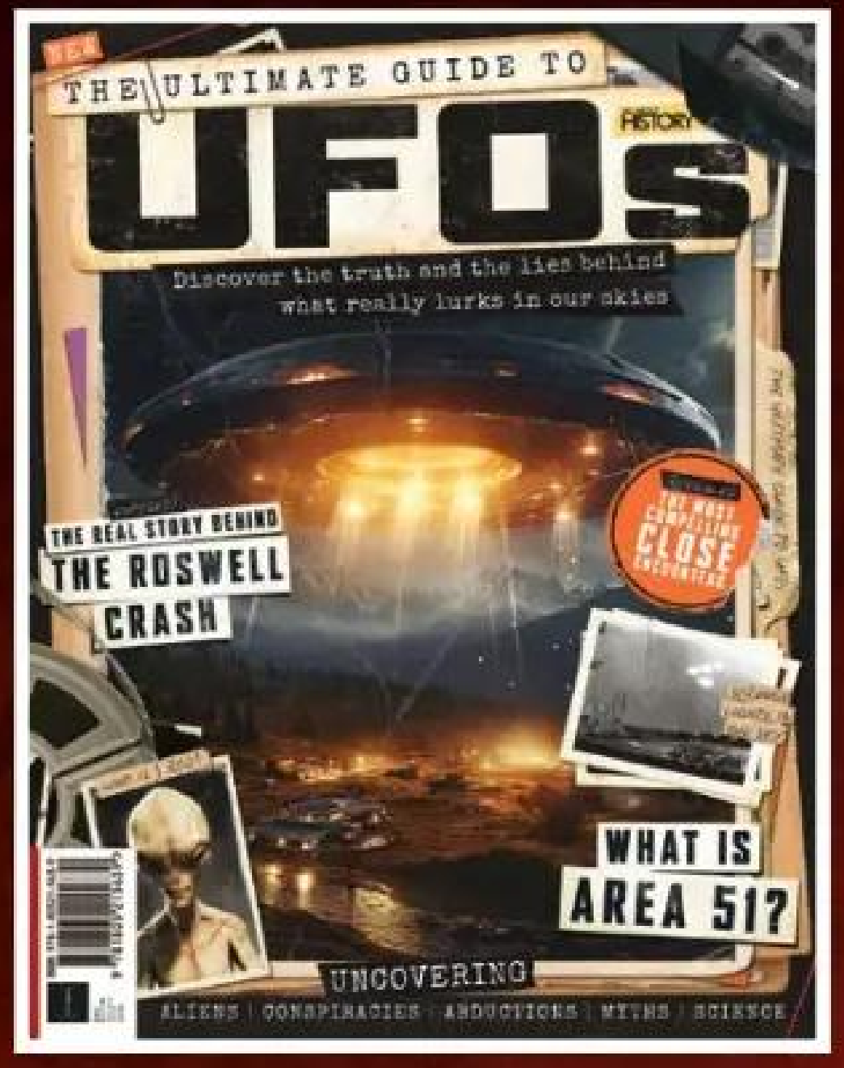
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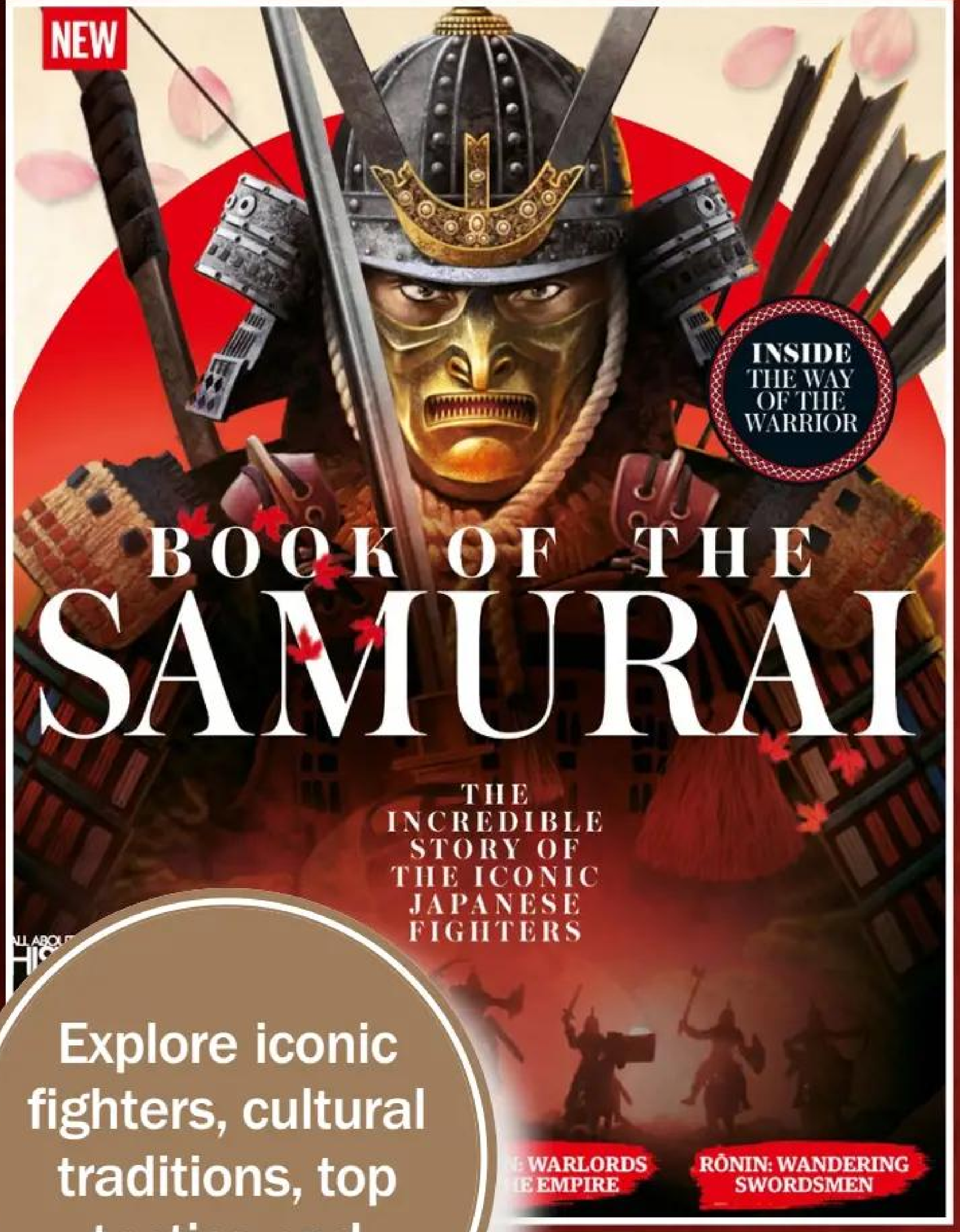
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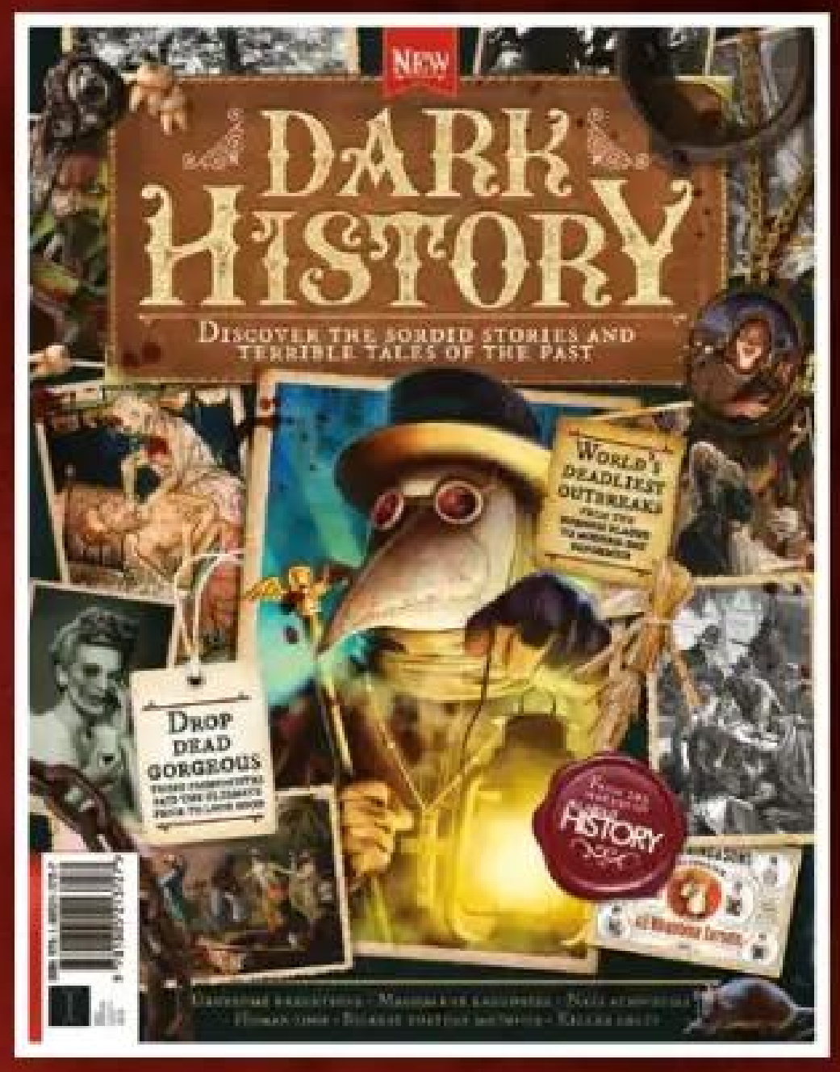
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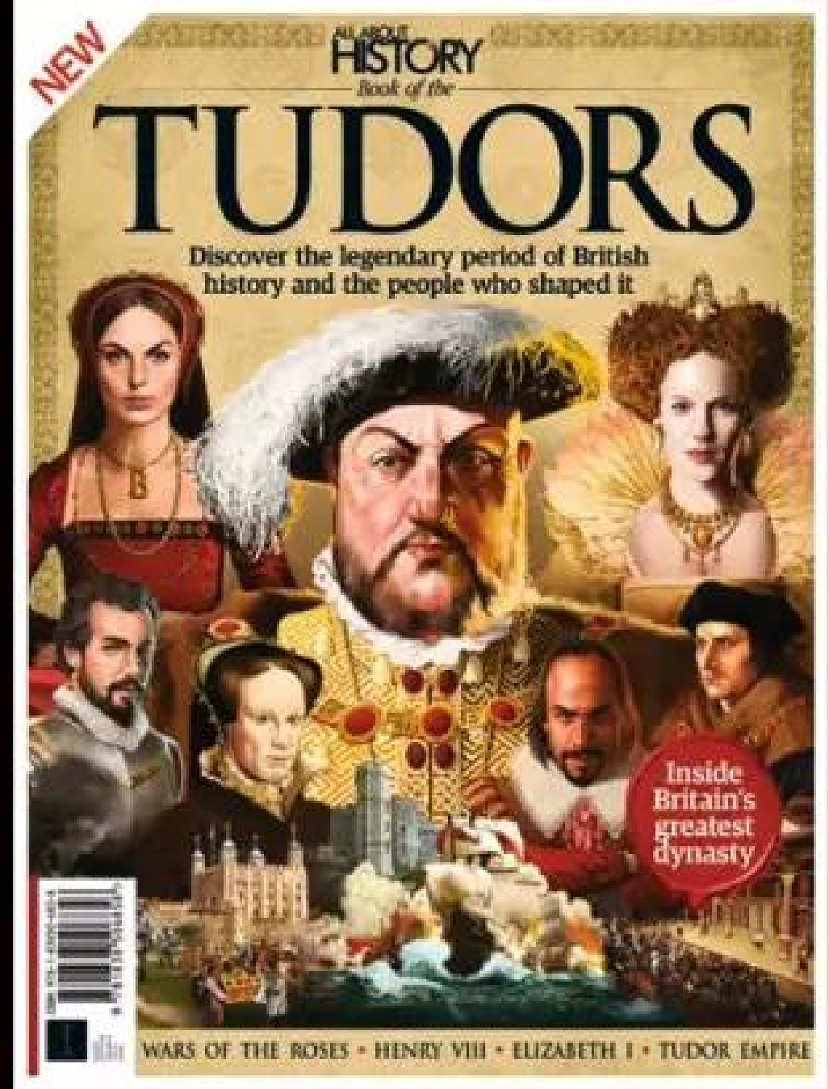

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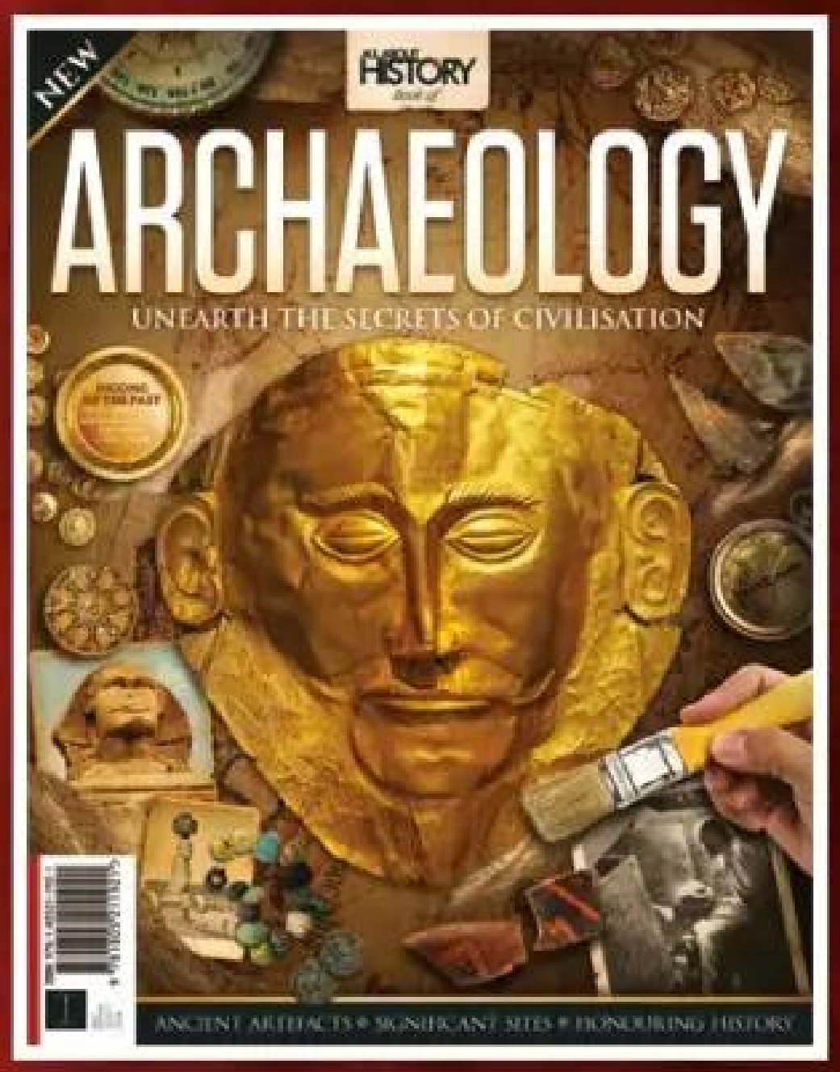
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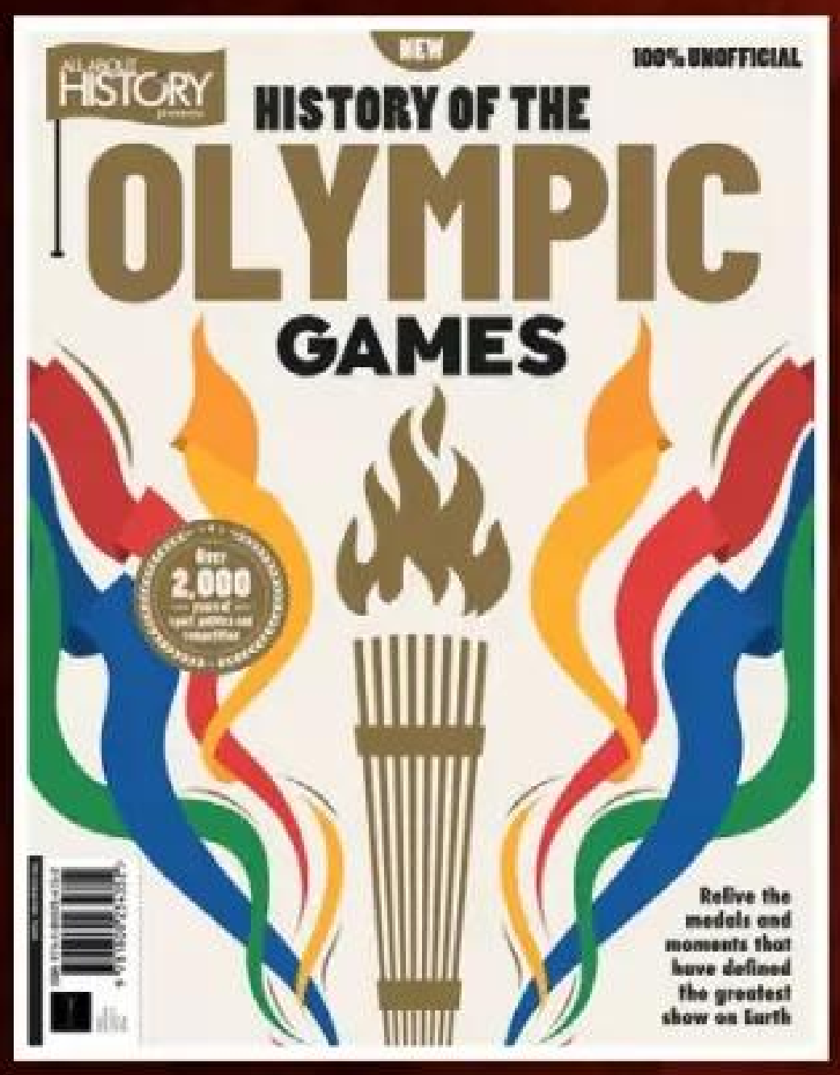
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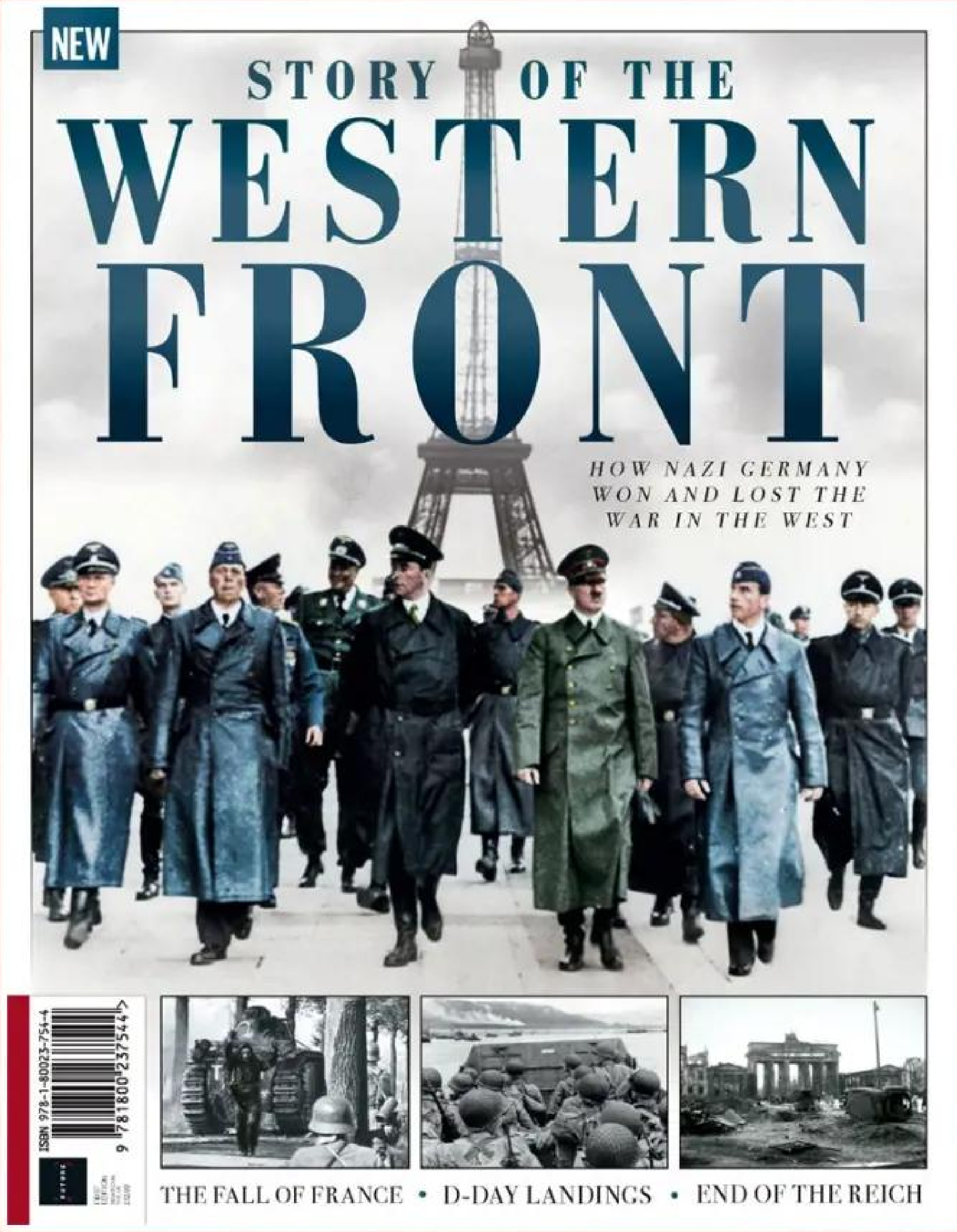
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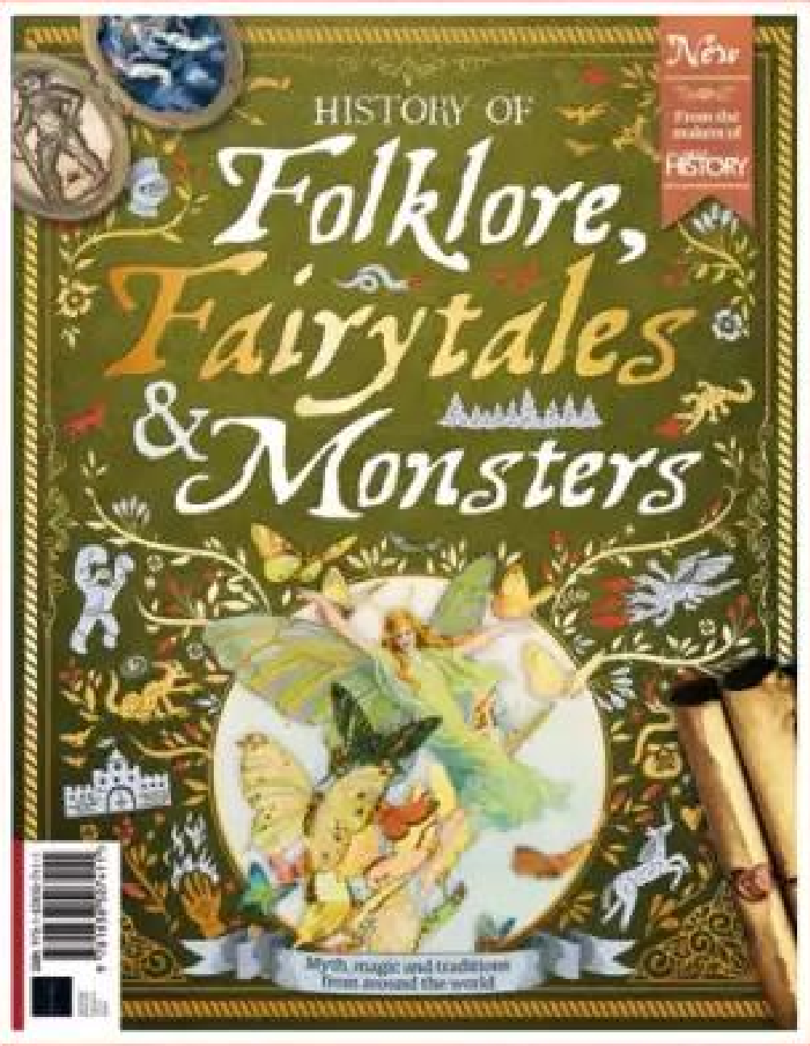
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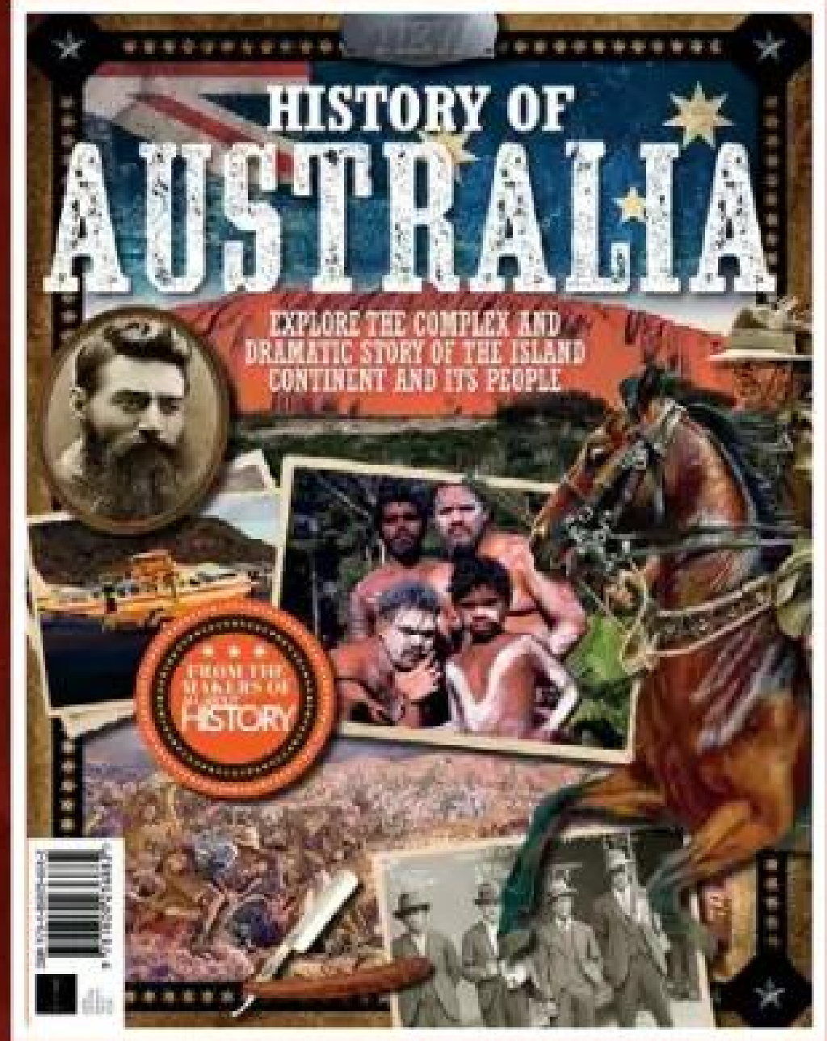
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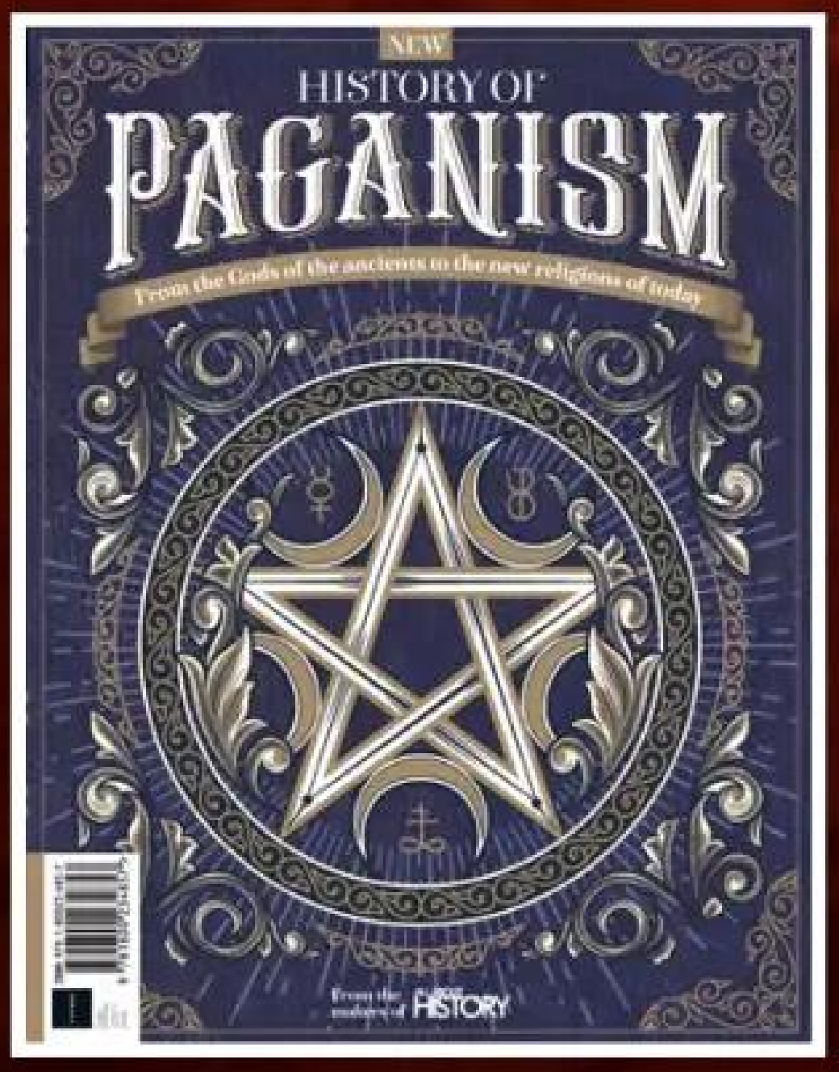
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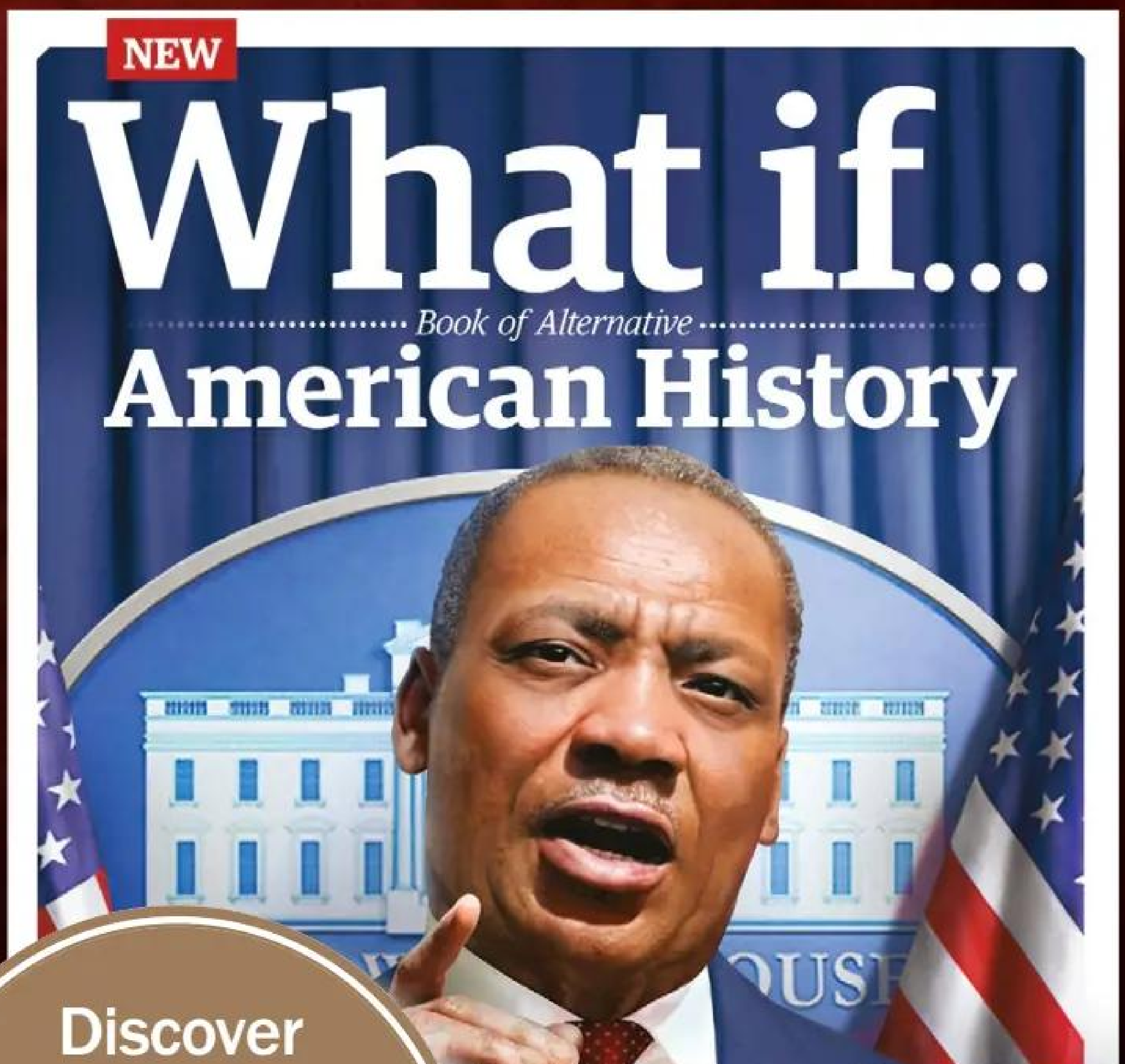
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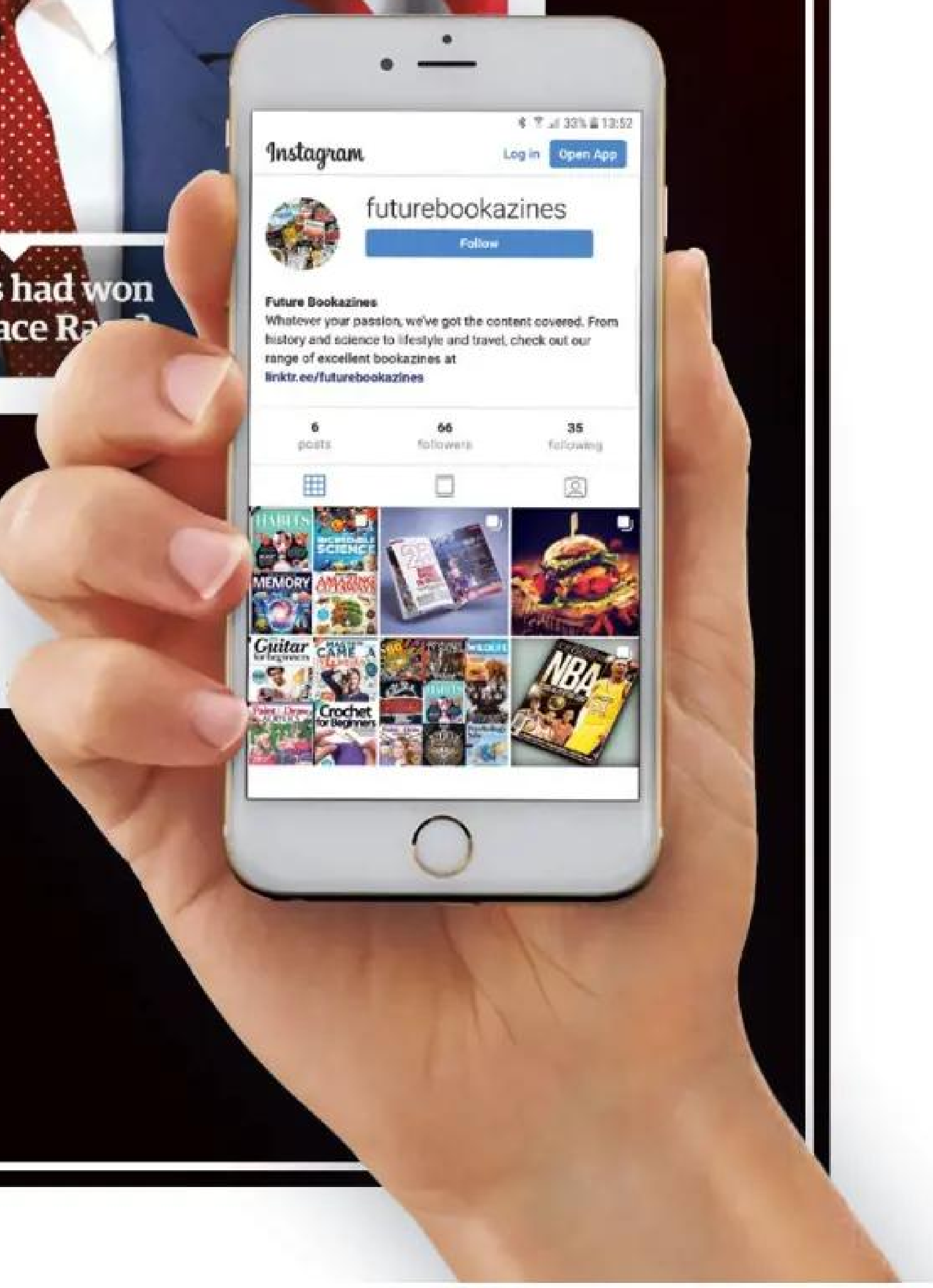
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